

# A Spartan's Tale

by nickmac3

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Summary: A Spartan IV, seperated from his team, and his universe, must learn to adapt. First person POV, told from an OC's perspective. No parings.

## 1. Chapter 1

With a thump, the pelican landed in the hangar bay. The aft door dropped, and we stepped out. The Spartan bay on the Infinity was a madhouse of activity. Crimson had just returned ahead of us by just a little bit, as usual. What was unusual about this time was that they have Majestic with them, and another artifact.

"Looks like Crimson's building quite the collection of Forerunner artifacts," I remarked, not really surprised.

"Yeah. Maybe now Science would actually make some \_useful\_ new gadgets for us to test," Ralph Stevens, the Spartan to my left, grumbled. He was a big man with a perpetual growl. He always seemed in a foul mood whenever we returned back to Infinty after an op. Probably something about always returning just after Crimson.

"Hey, come on man. Just because Crimson brings in all the Forerunner goods doesn't mean their better. It just means that they get all the cool stuff." Jack Robinson tried cheering him up. Didn't work, just as usuall. Robinson was the funny guy of the squad, or fireteam, or whatever this is. He had a comment for almost anything. I think he stays up most of the night just thinking up jokes and when they should be used for maximum effect. It had no use, everyone just ignores them anyways.

"Whatever, does it really matter? We're all on the same side anyways. Just as long as there is less Covies running around at the end of an op." Just what I expected from Mike Loman. All he seemed to care about was killing the Covies. I think it might have something to do with the fact that he watched the Covenant glass his home planet

while he was ordered to withdraw. I think he just blamed himself.

"Officer on deck!" With my observation, the others snapped to position on the line. Commander Palmer walked up and returned the salute. "At ease, Atom. You did good today. Clearing out that Covie stronghold with no backup was impressive. You have the rest of the day off. I hope I can trust you enough not to get into much trouble."

"Yes, ma'am. We'll be good. Not sure how long though." Jack didn't seem to mind the glare I sent him. All I got was a little shrug.

"Good. And Spartan Thompson, your armor requisition is cleared. You might want to head down to the armory to pick up the armor." With that last remark, she walked away without waiting for a response. She walked over to where Crimson and Majestic we're waiting.

"Well, I'll see you guys later. Meet up at the mess in an hour?" With the commander gone, I turned to the others.

"Yeah, sure."

"Whatever."

"Don't be late."

I left the group, making my way to the back of the hangar. There was a tram set up that could take us where we wanted. It was a little while before I got to the armory, but it didn't matter. There were not too many pressing concerns in the armory. Usually it was just patching up holes in the armor or putting on a new coat of paint where it was burned off. The armor techs were waiting for me when I got off the tram.

"Spartan Nick Thompson?" The lead tech seemed satisfied with my small nod as confirmation of my identity. "Good. Now, if you'll follow me, we'll get that old armor off, and you can select the new pieces. Also, Science team asked me to add a few 'experimental' upgrades to your armor. When we're finished here, they want you to go see them on the science deck."

I sighed. "All right." It was a pain to go see them, they were a couple decks up and much farther aft from most of the attractions here on S-deck. It was always a fairly long trip.

I followed the head tech to one of the armor rigs. The large circles with robotic arms on them could assemble and deassemble the MJOLNIR armor much quicker than a tech with the right tools could. I stepped into the ring and let it reposition me, tilting back slightly so it could have better access to the armor. When it finished it's task, the arms with the armor pieces withdrew back into the floor, taking my old armor with it.

As I stepped out of the ring, the tech looked at me. "Science also requested that your undersuit get an upgrade as well. Something to do with more advanced crystalline layers and superconductors. Or something like that. Anyways, if you don't mind, you'll have to strip that undersuit. The new one is on that crate to the side." With that,

the tech turned around, giving me some privacy. I quickly slipped out of the undersuit and put on the new one. Aside from being slightly thicker, there was no change. "Done."

"Good. Now i'll let you select your armor customizations then." I followed the scientist to a console. I keyed in my ID code, and the console opened up my available armor customizations. Deciding to try a new helmet, I picked the Pathfinder helmet. It had good visibility while providing less of a target than my old EVA helmet. I next chose HAZOP shoulder armor. The chestplate I decided on was the EVA, with the breach skin. I decided on the XG-89 Narrow armor for the legs, and the XV-27 Shifting armor for the forearms, customized with the circuit skin. With my selections confirmed, i walked back to the armor ring. I saw that the console needed verification three times from the tech before it was satisfied. All that did was make me wonder what sort of upgrades my armor would be getting.

Once I stepped back into the ring, it whirred up and began suiting me. After it was done, I stepped out and looked over my armor. Nothing really changed, it was still the steel grey color with ice blue highlights. Going to take off my helmet, I noticed something different about my right handplate. The palm had a small lens on it. I tried to ask the tech, but he didn't know what it was or what it was for. "I'm just here to make sure the machine doesn't malfunction again."

"Again? What do you mean 'again?'"

"Never mind, forget I said anything. Anyways, science is waiting for you."

"Right. I better get going. Thanks for your help."

With my new, slightly modified armor, I walked out of the armory and got back on the tram, this time headed for the elevators.

On the way, I called Jack. "I'm probably going to be late. Science made some additions to my armor, and they want to see me upstairs. Don't wait up."

"Yeah, sure. I'll tell the other guys. Any idea what the additions were, or when the rest of us can expect to get them?"

"No clue. I'm at the elevators now. I'll see you guys later."

\* \* \*

><p>Well, I'm back. Hopefully i won't abandon this one. If you have anyquestions about the story, ask. I'll try to answer any questions that don't have an impact on the plot or that I'm already planning on answering in the story. This story will have a similar voting system to the last one, but just to clarify, I'll state the rules.<p>

1. Unless stated otherwise, you can only choose one option, no matter how many choices there are.

2. you get one voting entry per account, guest votes will be ignored.

3. Voting will last until I edit the chapter, saying that voting is

closed. Most times that will be about a week. Results may or may not be posted.

4. You may either vote by submitting a review, or by PM to me. You choose.

5. In the vote submission, please include both the option letter or number and the option it's self. This will help eliminate confusion on my part.

Now that that's over, let's get on to the vote.

Vote #1: Shepard

This has gone on long enough. Look for results at the end of the third chapter

## 2. Chapter 2

After the short elevator ride, and the long tram ride, I finally arrived at the science lab. It was always busy, with all the researchers scrambling to examine the latest promethean artifact ground teams recover. Usually, it is just weapon tech, but occasionally they would get a big find like the artifact Crimson recovered the first mission, or the artifact they and majestic just brought back. Science was also usually busy developing new tech for the spartan ground teams, and it was always Fireteam Atom that was the guennie pig.

"Ah, Spartan Thompson. Glad your here. Now, if you could follow me, I could answer any questions you may have about your armor's 'improvements.'" Dr. Conners, the one who always greets any Spartans visiting Science. I don't know would disappoint me more, if he was he head of the Spartan tech group, or if he was just the one they appointed to talk to Spartans. Conners was a rat of a man, thin, scrawny, every time I saw him it was like he was always trying to wriggle out of my sight. He always seemed like the typical mad scientist, always placing the importance of science over the safety of individuals. I guess that's why they always sent him to see me.

I followed him into a lab separated from the large room that is home to most of Science's activities. He sat behind the desk, completely at ease. "I know what you're wondering. You're probably wondering something like 'Oh I sure do wonder what the great and almighty Science team has developed for me today and why I need to have new armor to use it. I hope it's something that will be wonderfully useful.' Well, wonder no further." Dr. Connors seemed to always be trying to deliver a sales pitch. Probably from dealing with what he thought were corporate executives too worried with outdated notions like 'safety' or 'ethics'.

"Let's start off with the simple things first. I'm sure you noticed that lens on your left palm. That is a reverse-engineered Forerunner scanner, similar to the one that first scanned the Infinity before we crashed on Requiem last year. I'm sure you can remember that. Anyways, we decided that we are not satisfied with just what artifacts we can recover from the mission sights. Most artifacts are too big to get back to the Infinity anyways. That's where you and that scanner come in. If while on missions to Promethean sites, if

you would kindly scan artifacts, that would be very helpful to us. 'But wait!' you say. 'What about the modifications to the rest of my armor, and my undersuit?' I was getting to that, just be patient." I let him rant on. Sometimes he can be like a supervillian. Sometimes it's just better to let him rant on, with the chance that he'll reveal some of his evil scheme.

"Thanks to some interesting Forerunner artifacts and data teams have recovered, we may have found a way to prevent Rampancy in AIs. Naturally, this is a complex process, so I won't bore you with the details. Lets just say that while, much of the original creation process stays the same, still requiring a human brain, there is one crucial new step in the process. Again, it's complicated, so I won't bore you with the details. So far, we have only created one of these new AIs, just for testing. After extensive brainstorming to come up with a non-essential purpose for the AI, so as not to have any issues if we are wrong about this, and it just makes the AI descend into Rampancy faster, we decided to give the AI to you." I gave a soft groan at this.

"Now, now. It's not what you think. It's not that you're not important, it's that you're somewhat easily replaceable. Anyway, the undersuit has an added memory processor superconductor layer, to allow the AI to exist in your suit. Since the AI will be residing between your suit and your head, it will help speed up reaction time, as well as further speed up your movements in the suit."

"Wait, what do you mean, 'between my suit and my head?'"

"Well, the AI will reside in your neural interface. Because of the fact that the interface connects your mind with the suit, the AI will be in both the suit and your head at the same time. Don't worry though. The AI has limited access to only parts of your brain. Nothing important. In fact, the relationship will be beneficial."

With the clarification settled, he turned partway and reached into a cubby built into the wall. I knew from experience that that was where Connors kept all the new toys he wanted me or my squad to test. He turned back around with a card, maybe about the same size as a deck of cards, but half as thick. He set it down on the desk, and a hologram was projected from the center of the card.

The hologram was of a woman, blond, most likely tall. Kind of hard to tell based on the size of the hologram. She appeared to be some kind of hunter, at least based on her dress. She wore a tunic and leggings, partially covered with a long, animal skin cloak. She also wore leather boots, with a tuft of fur coming out the tops.

"Spartan Thompson, allow me to introduce you too..."

"I can give my own introduction, thank you, Dr. Connors," The hologram cut into Connors' speech, giving him a cool glare. She turned back to me. "My name is Saria, and it is a pleasure to meet you, Spartan Thompson. You have a very impressive service record."

"Thank you. It's a pleasure for me as well. And please, call me Nick."

"Yes, yes. We're all very pleased to meet each other. Now, if you would be willing to turn around and kneel down, I will put in the chip for you." Dr. Connors was clearly annoyed that Saria had cut off his surely carefully planned speech. He clearly wanted to get the meeting back under his control.

I gave a small shrug and complied. It was a second before he slid the chip in, but as soon as he did, the effect was noticeable. It was an odd feeling, sort of like a cool liquid dripping down the back of my skull, but it did not last long. "Nice place you got here. Roomy, but not too roomy. I approve." Saria came in through my helmet speakers, but it seemed like there was a slight echo. I may have just been imagining things though.

"How do you feel?" Connors was clearly doing an impromptu medical examination.

"I feel fine. Can I stand back up now?"

"Good, good. Yes you can stand back up, but slowly. Be careful." I could hear a soft scribbling from behind me, and I could tell Connors was taking notes. Probably checked a box labeled 'Did not die' or something like that. Safety tests were not high on Connors' priorities.

I stood up and turned around. I managed to sneak a peek at his clipboard. I was right. "Now hold still. I'm just going to scan your head, to make sure you are not having any adverse reactions to having another entity in your head." There was a pause, followed by a slight buzzing in my head. "Nope, you're fine. Now, back to business." This time it was Saria who have a groan, at least just inside my helmet.

"Naturally, we need to test how well you two can work together. So I went ahead and pulled some strings with Spartan. I set up a War Games match for you in three days. You will be going up solo against Fireteam Majestic."

"What?! One vs. five? How is that fair?"

"Thompson, please. You know this can't be fair. This is a test of how well you work together. If you had your team, then it wouldn't be an accurate test. And Majestic is an average group. They won't be too hard so that you have now hope, but they won't be too easy that the test will be ineffective. Now then, if you have no further questions or concerns, you can leave."

As soon as the sentence was finished, I uttered a quick "Good" and left. It felt good to be away from Dr. Connors. And a sigh of relief through the speakers told me I was not the only one who felt this way. "You don't like him much either, do you?"

Saria was quick to reply. "Not really. He always gave me the creeps. It's good to finally be able to get away from him. And don't worry about the War Games. I'm sure we'll do fine. Besides, you forgot. It'll be two vs. five."

"Right."

\* \* \*

><p>Happy holidays to anyone reading this. Hope you all have a happy New Year. Just wanted to say that incase I don't get another chapter out before the New Year. Anyways, here is another chapter. Sorry, I had it mostly finished for 3 days. Took me a while to work out Saria's name and appearence, but I'm finaly happy with it.<p>

### 3. Chapter 3

The long trip to my cabin from the Science complex on Infinity was uneventful, aside from a stop in the mess. I ran into Majestic, apparently finished with whatever tasks were involved with bringing back an artifact. My entrance did not go unnoticed.

"Well, look who it is. Mr. 'I can take on all of Majestic by myself!' What are you, suicidal?" DeMarco was obviously looking for a fight. The others, however, didn't look as enthusiastic.

"No, DeMarco. I didn't volunteer, I got volunteered. This isn't a pride fight, Science wants a 'fair' test of some new equipment."

DeMarco perked up at the thought of new equipment. "If we beat you, does that mean that we get your new gadgets?" He had a look of greed in his eyes.

"No DeMarco, you get the satisfaction of knowing that the five of you beat one man and you get my respect. Got to work your way up to the respect of your peers somehow."

DeMarco got a bit red in the face, then turned back to glare at the rest of Majestic, who were chuckling at DeMarco's expense. I left them to go grab some food, and the rest of my meal was uneventful. As I walked back to my cabin though, Saria had a question.

"Why didn't you just fight him? You probably could have beat him, and the rest of his squad didn't look like they would have helped out."

"Yeah, while that may be true, it just would have caused more problems. Sometimes it's easier to just ignore the problem, or solve it with talking. Violence can lead to more problems then it solves."

"I guess that's true. Still would have liked to see you fight him though."

"There's plenty of time for that in three days. For now, best not to cause any problems."

When I got back to my cabin, I immediately noticed something that wasn't there before. It was a small pedestal, about waist high, like the ones that were on most starships. Most starships didn't have them installed in unimportant cabins though.

There was a note attached. It read: "For when you want to take your armor off. Better than just leaving the chip on the table." The note proved my suspicions. The pedestal was a holoprojector and AI storage unit.

"You wanna try it out?"

"Sure. I'm ready."

At her signal, I pulled the chip from the back of my skull. The odd feeling that was there since Dr. Connors put her chip in the back of my head faded instantly, and I knew I was alone in my head once again. I plugged the chip into the slot in the side of the pedestal, and after a slight delay, Saria's avatar appeared over the holoprojector.

"This is nice. The projector has access to your computer, so I'm not just stuck in here."

I turned my head slightly to look at the small desk next to the projector. The computer had some icon or something flashing on the screen. It wasn't the mail message, so I took it to be the remote access icon. I wasn't really sure. Spartans don't spend much time in their cabins, about three hours every two days, max. Most of us spent our time either in the War Games simulators, in the S-gym, or jogging around the ship.

Just then, the door slid open. Ralph, Jack, and Mike walked in. Suddenly the room got a lot more cramped. Jack was the first to talk, as always.

"Hey, saw you were back, and we decided to pop in. How was your visit with Science?"

"You know, the usual. Connors being Connors, the rest of Science quietly cowering in fear, if they even notice you."

Ralph gave a small snort at this. "Alright, pleasantries are over. What new tech did they give you?"

"Biggest change was a scanner put into the left palm. They want us to try to get data on artifacts too big to bring back to Infinity."

"What's the pedestal for?"

I turned to look at Mike. I was surprised he even noticed. He actually seemed a little annoyed that it was there. Then I realized. The pedestal was in his usual spot. He would stand there, leaning against the wall, arms crossed and head down. Now he was in the same pose, just in the back corner of the room.

"I was getting to that. The other major change was a thicker undersuit, adding a layer. That layer allows an AI to be in my armor, similar to the Master Chief and Cortana. Speaking of AIs, that's what the pedestal is for. Saria, if you would introduce yourself?"

Her avatar once again popped up over the pedestal. The rest of the squad seemed surprised. "Hello Ralph, Mike, Jack. It's good to finally meet you. Since I will be in Nick's armor, I will also be able to help out in the field. So play nice now." With that brief greeting, her avatar disappeared again. She was probably working on something else, but I could tell she was still listening.



"Well, that was ... unexpected." Jack was the first to break the ice, as always.

"Yeah. That was the best part of my visit with Science. In order to test how well we work together, they decided to put us up against Majestic."

"So? We've beat Majestic before. They weren't too hard." Count on Ralph to remember who we've beat in War Games.

"I know we have, but in this case, 'we' means Saria and I. Effectively five on one. Not exactly great odds."

"Still. Do it right, and with a bit of luck, you can do it."

"Thanks."

They could tell I was done talking, so after a little while longer, they left. The next couple days were a blur, and before I knew it, it was time to head down to the War Games simulators. Just hope I'm ready.

\* \* \*

><p>Shall I announce the results of the first vote? Sure, why not? The results are:<p>

Gender: Female

Background: Spacer

Psyc Profile: War Hero

#### 4. Chapter 4

As I walked into the simulator observation room, I immediately noticed two things out of the ordinary. The first was that Science had a few representatives here. Figures they wanted some people to monitor this 'test'. Second thing out of the ordinary was that Commander Palmer was in the room as well. Something not out of the ordinary is that I beat Majestic here as well.

I quickly snapped to attention once I walked into the room. "At ease, Spartan. I'm just here because its not every day that Science requests such an unbalanced War Games match. I'm interested to see how this goes."

Just then, Majestic walked in. DeMarco seemed dead focused on winning. He just completely ignored me as he walked by. The rest of Majestic gave me a small nod in greeting, one that I returned. Now that everyone was here, the briefing could begin.

"Spartans, as you can guess, this will not be a normal War Games match. In addition to the uneven sides, Science wants an accurate test, which means we will be more accurately simulating combat situations. That means no 'respawn.' Once you are downed, you are out. In addition, there will be no ordinance calls, and no score tracker or time limit. The match will end either when Majestic is

wiped out, or when Thompson is eliminated. Weapons will be found in the match, but you can choose your armor abilities and packages. Good luck out there."

With a quick "Yes, ma'am," we walked out of the observation room and out onto the simulator deck. We took our places, me standing on one side of a large yellow line, Majestic on the other, each of us with nothing to do but stare down the opposition.

The sudden blaring of the sirens in the room was just a warning that the arena was about to build itself. Nothing really interesting, I had seen it thousands of times. The yellow line disappeared, and Majestic and I started to drift away from each other, the ground slowly gaining texture as we went. By the time the ground under my feet stopped moving, I was able to recognize the map. Shatter. One of the newer maps, but still one I knew my way around. I could tell that I would be starting by the receiver of the teleporter. I assumed the weapons would be inside the reactor room.

When the map was finished building, the loudspeakers gave a five second countdown. On the last beep, I started moving. In the reactor room, there was a weapon rack, just like I thought. However, one thing that I did not count on was the weapon selection. Or lack of selection. The only thing on the rack was a sim knife. Used for safety in War Games, the knife was not sharp, or even solid, but a spring loaded piece of metal. When you went to stab someone with it, the 'blade' would be pushed into the hilt by the victim's body, and the knife would emit a pulse to lockdown the armor, signifying a 'kill'.

"Well then. Saria, could you patch me into their com frequency and give me an ear on them?"

"Already on it. Just a second... There. Enjoy your eavesdropping."

"Thanks."

Already I could hear Majestic's com chatter. "This it? An assault rifle, a DMR, a shotgun, a pistol, a BR, and a bunch of grenades?" DeMarco seemed disappointed by their arsenal. "Shotgun!" I figured Hoya would go for the shotgun. DeMarco just ignored him. "Alright, here's the plan. Hoya, you go ahead, see if you can flush him out. Madsen and Grant will lay up in positions for overwatch. Thorne and I will be insurance."

"What are we going to do?"

"I'll use Active-camo to get the drop on Hoya when he gets here. He'll probably have some grenades on him, those could come in handy. Only problem is that I don't have re-supply active."

"That's not a problem. I can switch you armor packages. It's a matter of software anyways. Your armor has all of them installed, the system just can't handle the load of all of them on at once."

"Good. Do it."

Any further conversation was ended, as a red dot showed up on the edge of my tracker. Just to make sure he could tell where I was, I

moved across the room. I then slowly made my way to a corner, one by the door where it seemed like Hoya was going to come in. Once Hoya got close, I dropped in a crouch and activated the active-camo.

I was right. Hoya came in the doorway I thought he would, and once in, he started a slow sweep of the room. "DeMarco, the guy's got active-camo. I'm still gonna try to flush him out." Once his back was turned, I crept my way closer to him. The last few feet I rose up and ran at him, giving Hoya just enough time to turn towards me before I tackled him and drove the sim knife into his visor. There was a soft click, and he immediately stopped struggling.

I picked up his shotgun, and looked to see what kind of grenades he had. He had two plasma grenades. "Good. Now we have some firepower. Be careful, they are probably watching the doors."

As I slowly crept out of the doors, I noticed that the large rock outcroppings blocked view of the door from the center guardhouse, the most likely spot for a sniper to set up, if he had someone to watch his back. I dropped into a crouch and activated active-camo again, and slowly crept up the sloped rock face. I stopped when I was able to see someone in the center window hole. I crept back, so I was out of view, and thought out a plan of action. The ramp was too far away to sprint to, and my active-camo probably would not last me long enough to get to cover. After a minute, I finally decided on an action. With camo on, I stood up long enough to hurl a plasma grenade at the figure in the window before ducking down again. Over Majestic's coms, I heard Grant utter a confused "Wha-" before the grenade exploded.

I peeked back over the rock again. The guardhouse was clear, with the figure, who I took to be Grant, slumped against a wall, disabled. I took the chance and quickly made my way up the ramp and into the guardhouse, and picked up the abandoned BR on the floor. Madsen must have seen me because he immediately chimed in on the coms. "Hey, Thorne. He's up in the guardhouse. I could use some help out here."

"On my way."

To try to pinpoint Madsen's location, I briefly stuck my head out the window facing their side of the map, then quickly drew it back in. A DMR round just missed my head, coming from the direction of their reactor room. Madsen was probably on the roof. With camo on, I moved out into the window and oped fire on Madsen with the BR. He seemed to panic a bit, because instead of withdrawing back into cover, he put down a regen field. His shields did not get a chance to recharge under my continuous fire, and Madsen dropped just as Thorne came around the corner, saw me, and opened fire.

The assault rifle ate away at my shields a little, but I got back into cover before they took too much damage. Thorne was coming up the ramp, trying to catch me in the open for a burst with his assault rifle. I switched to the shotgun, and as soon as he came around the corner, I blasted him. He didn't stand a chance.

I went down the ramp to their side, and turned the corner, headed to their base to look for DeMarco. It was just me and him. When I turned the corner, and came out through the rocks, I was face to knee with a Mantis. I quickly darted back behind the cover of the rocks.

"How are we going to take that out? You don't have the firepower."

I looked around for a second, and got an idea. "I got something. I'm gonna need as much speed as I can get, and I need you to be ready to activate mag-boots on my signal."

"Working... Okay. Ready."

"Good."

I dropped my guns. I needed speed, and they would just slow me down. After a deep breath, I raced out, towards the closest rock pillar to the Mantis. With bullets hitting the ground just after my feet leave the ground, I knew it was going to be close. When I got close enough, I jumped. The bullets left my trail, seems like DeMarco thought I was just running for better cover. Once I hit the rock, I jumped off it, sailing even higher into the air. I lined it up perfectly.

"Now!"

With a thump, I landed heavily on top of the Mantis. As soon as DeMarco realized where I was, he did everything he could do to shake me off. Good thing Saria got the mag-boots on. With a satisfying crunch, I planted my remaining plasma grenade on the hatch of the Mantis. "Turn them off."

I quickly jumped off the top of the Mantis, making sure to be out of the blast radius and the firing arc of the guns. Behind me, the Mantis exploded with a satisfying boom. Suddenly, the room went back to the featureless white state it was in before the match. Majestic got up off the ground, most of them groaning. I offered a hand to DeMarco, but he just ignored it. Commander Palmer came in over the speakers.

"Congratulations, Thompson. You managed to beat Majestic singlehanded. Lets hope that's enough combat data for the eggheads. Majestic, Thompson managed to beat you singlehanded. Looks like you need a little more practice. You are all dismissed."

Saria came in through my internal helmet speakers. "We did it."

"Yes we did."

\* \* \*

><p>Well, that's that. Anyway, that was my first combat heavy chapter, so how did I do? Also, rest assured, the crossover will be happening soon, most likely at the end of the next chapter, maybe the chapter after that.<p>

EDIT: It was pointed out to me that I used "Crimson" instead of Majestic at one point. This has been fixed.

## 5. Chapter 5

With everyone in their seats, the Pelican lifted off of the deck and eased its way out the hangar. The space around the Infinity was

clear, any Covie ships stupid enough to approach the ship after the immense display of force upon arrival were blasted out of the sky with impunity. For the most part, the ride down from the Infinity to the inner surface of Requiem was quiet and uneventful. We were psyching ourselves up for the mission, nothing unusual. Every group had their different methods, and I seen most, if not all, in my 15 years of service. Ours was the quiet reflecting and thinking, as opposed to the loud, energetic passenger compartments some unit leaders seemed to enjoy.

Once we got onto the ground, the pelican quickly lifted away, dropping our warthogs on the way. Our usual handler, Helinberg, came up through the coms. "Well, Atom, looks like you guys drew the short straw today. Science has requested that you go in and get several scans of a massive artifact that was recently located in a nearby structure. Lucky for you, it's just at the end of the canyon you're currently in. So just drive on in, clear the base of any hostiles, get some scans, and call a ride back to the ship."

Saria instantly realized the hole in the brief. "Why does Science only want scans? Don't they usually send teams down to locations like this?"

Helinberg seemed caught off-guard. "I don't know, maybe they actually learned from that incident with Gagarin?"

Robinson immediately chimed in. "Science learning something is about as likely as ONI announcing their intentions."

Finished prepping the Warthogs, we got in them and drove off down the canyon. The path was fairly narrow, just wide nought for the two Warthogs with just enough maneuvering room. We ran into a couple of Covie scouts, they turned out to be only a little more trouble than speedbumps.

When we got to the end of the canyon, the massive doors were closed, guarded by several Elites, and a couple cowering Grunts. The Grunts were quickly shredded by the two heavy machine guns mounted on the back of the Warthogs, the Elites took a little longer. By the time we got the doors open, the Warthogs had been barely touched.

The doors opened wide enough to let the Warthogs in, and inside, we were all stunned. The interior was a huge open area, roughly shaped like a circle. In the middle of the ceiling, there was a large pillar or something suspended over a round pit in the floor. On the far side of the pit, there was a bank of Forerunner consoles, probably controlling whatever this room was for. Throughout the room there was a large number of Covenant forces, including several Ghosts, and even a Hunter pair.

The two Warthogs quickly split up, circling around the room separately. Stevens brought us around to the left, where the Hunters were, while Robinson and Loman went off to the right, where there was a higher concentration of Ghosts. I quickly lost them as I focused on the enemies ahead of us. Luckily, there were only a few Ghosts, the biggest problem was the Hunter pair.

"Stevens, bring us strait to the Hunters, then at the last second, swerve around the side. Maybe we can get a shot at their backs."

Stevens didn't reply, but he went ahead with my order. It worked perfectly. The Hunters probably thought that we were going to try to ram them with the Warthog, and settled down behind their shields, bracing for impact. They were surprised when, instead of the Warthog hitting their shields, it swerved and bullets bit at their unprotected backs. I managed to bring one down on the first pass, but I could tell that it wasn't going to work. The last Hunter seemed to be more wary now. Stevens slowly turned around, preparing for another charge at the Hunter while I cleaned out some of the Covies shooting at us, taking out the Ghosts quickly. I turned back front, just in time to see Stevens steer the hog head on at the Hunter and use its slightly sloped shield as a ramp. I quickly turned again, and managed to bring down the second Hunter with a sustained burst to its back.

I looked over across the room, and the other two were just finishing up with their side of the room, so Stevens and I mopped up the rest of the Covies on our side before heading over to the consoles. We got there first, and I hopped off the back. As I walked up to the console, a gold-armored Elite deactivated his active-camo, activated his energy sword, and charged me with a vicious roar. Probably something along the lines of "Die, Demon!"

I waited until he got up close, just about to lunge at me with his sword. I quickly sidestepped, and palmed a plasma grenade onto his side. Then, with a small hop, I kicked off of the Elite's knee, sending him stumbling sideways and propelling me out of the blast radius. After the explosion, I stepped over him and gave him one round through the head, just to be sure. I then picked up his sword and put it onto the mag strip on the side of my left thigh. Probably would come in handy later.

My takedown of the Elite gave everyone else enough time to catch up to me, and we walked towards the console. "Alright Saria, any idea what we're looking for here?"

"If I had to guess, I would say it would probably be that giant pillar hanging from the ceiling. You know, in the center of the room above that giant pit."

"Okay, okay. Once we take the scan, send a copy to Science right away. Robinson, you can call in that pelican now."

"On it."

I stepped up to the console, held my hand over it, and activated the scanner. A small bean of orange light shot out of my palm and steeped across the console. I then pointed my hand up at the pillar and scanned that as well.

"Give me a second... There. Scans sent up to Science on Infinity. Lets hope they got what they wanted."

As if on que, Dr. Connors came on the coms, if only to prove Saria wrong. "Actually, Fireteam Atom, looking at the results, it looks like the device is not harmful. Maybe you could power it up, and take some more scans of it."

Helinberg came on after Connors. "Unfortunately, Atom, Science is in

charge of this op. If they want something done, you should do it."

"Yes sir. We'll power it up, see what happens. Just make sure that pelican is almost here, we may need to make a quick exit."

I looked down at the control console. There were several large buttons, all in Forerunner script, so I couldn't easily tell which one turned on the machine. "Saria, know how to turn this death trap on?"

"It should be... That button there. Lets hope this thing doesn't blow us all up." Saria highlighted the button in question on my HUD.

All I responded with was a quick "Yeah." I held my finger over the button for a second, gathering breath and nerve, before pushing the button. Suddenly, a deep rumbling sound could be heard, as the pillar started glowing along several lines, before shooting a mass of color into the pit. We looked over the edge, and into a swirling slipspace portal. I quickly remembered to scan the pillar, what I now assumed to be a portal generator.

"Well, that's all we need here. Lets head to the evac point, and get back on Infinity."

Robinson seemed glad to be heading back. "Sounds good to me."

Stevens gave a gruff "Maybe we beat Crimson this time."

And Loman followed up with his usual silent shrug.

Saria, however had something else to tell us. "Heads up, boys. I'm picking up energy signatures all over the place. Prepare for a massive Promethean wave."

"Everyone, back to the Warthogs! Lets get out of here! Stevens, get on gun. I'll drive. Saria, give me Operator."

With Saria's warning, we all sprinted back to the Warthogs. I hopped in the driver's seat, while Stevens hopped on the gun. Just as the hogs started moving again, the Prometheans teleported in. They lined most of the wall, but the door was left uncovered.

As we sped towards the doors, the Knights attacked. The ones with the Scattershots and the ones with the Suppressors got up close, hoping to block the Warthogs, while the ones with the longer ranged weapons stayed back. I managed to splatter a few Knights, but the I hit one off, and bounced into the air. Just as a near miss with an incineration cannon hit nearby, sending the Warthog sinning out over the pit, with the portal at the bottom. A saw a near miss impact with the pillar over the pit, causing the lights on it to flicker, and then we were going down, into the pit. Stevens tried to jump off, but it was too late. The portal rushed up to meet me, and then we were through, the last thing I noticed was that the portal shut almost instantly behind me, and Stevens didn't make it through.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, that's another one down. Took me a while, got a minor case

of block. Next chapter shouldn't take too long, I've got most of it planned out.<p>

## 6. Chapter 6

The portal rushed up to meet me, and then we were through, the last thing I noticed was that the portal shut almost instantly behind me, and Stevens didn't make it through.

The Warthog, still tumbling through the air, landed with a heavy thud on the ground, upside down. A small cloud of brown-beige dust flew up in the air from the impact. I crawled out from under the flipped vehicle, and looked around, wondering where I was. It was a large plain, surrounded by mountains. All covered with that same brown-beige dust. I looked up. There was open sky, no ceiling. "We aren't on Requiem anymore."

"That might explain why the atmosphere is a mix of nitrogen and argon."

"Any clue where we are?"

"No. The stars aren't visible, but this doesn't look familiar. We could be on an unexplored world, possibly near or on an ancient Forerunner installation."

That's not good. Stranded somewhere with a limited oxygen supply, with little hope of rescue. This was one of the worst positions I've been in for a long time. With nothing better to do, I flipped the Warthog back onto its wheels, and looked it over. It seemed in good condition, only minor damage. I then checked my stash. Before every mission, I make sure to stock the Warthog with armor abilities, just to be sure that whatever situation comes up in the field, I'll be ready. I pulled out the passenger seat, and checked the compartment under it. It all seemed to be there. Hologram, autosentry, regeneration field, hard-light shield, thruster pack, and even a jetpack. In addition to the active camo on my back, I had everything. Check complete, I put the seat back. Just in time, too.

"Nick, it looks like we have company. Unidentified dropship, coming in."

I looked up and saw it. Whatever it was, it was not human, but it wasn't Covenant either. If anything, it looked almost like an insect. I hopped in the driver's seat, ready to get out of there if the occupants of the dropship proved hostile. "Great. Lets just see what it is that they want. If it goes south, I'll drive us out of here." I looked at the nearby mountains closely, looking for an escape route. I found a cave in one mountain, close to the bottom. That will do. Meanwhile, the dropship got closer.

The dropship started getting a blue glow, and I wasn't taking the chance. I sped away, heading for the cave I saw. An explosion happened somewhere to my left, and I figured it was the dropship's gun. I went faster. I reached the cave, and luckily, there was a bend in the back of the cave, allowing me to pull the Warthog in and protect it from the dropship. I figured that it was only a matter of time before that dropship let off some troops, so I hopped on the back turret. Because of the way I pulled in, the turret was facing



the entrance to the cave, at least from around the bend. Sure enough, I heard a loud noise, something of a cross between a roar and a growl. Probably one of the aliens shouting something, but I couldn't understand.

"How are we going to do this? What if they're friendly?"

"I figured I would let them make the first move. If they open fire, I'll do the same. If they don't, I'll just wait."

"Sounds good. Try not to piss them off too much."

I didn't have to wait long. A single-eyed being stepped around the corner, and immediately upon seeing me, opened fire. I did the same. Only difference was that my shields held, while the rounds from the heavy machine gun tore the being to shreds. Oddly, it seemed like it was mechanical. "Saria, any idea what we're looking at here?"

"Looks like a mobile platform for an AI."

"For an AI, these guys aren't so smart."

Just then, more of them turned the corner, one bigger than the others. I immediately let loose on the bigger one, not giving it a chance to fire, and once it was down, I took apart the others. By the time I was on the last one, my shields were down, and their bullets were pinging off my armor. Their guns didn't seem strong enough to be able to pierce the armor plating of the MJOLNIR.

The robotic assault on my position lasted for a couple more minutes, each wave easily put down by the turret. Eventually, however, the director of these AI forces got impatient, and apparently decided to take me on, one on one, if that is what it meant by the loud roar.

Eventually it came around the corner, and I opened fire. Its shields lasted longer than the robots', but not by much. Just enough to allow it to get close enough to tear me out of the turret before I killed it. After I got back to my feet, I took a minute to look at it closely. It looked like a large, humpbacked lizard, and I could tell it was strong, I didn't have to look at its arms to see that. Its eyes just helped to reinforce the lizard image in my head, slitted like a reptile's.

"Can you get anything on this thing?"

"Looks like it has multiple vital organs, maybe a backup system. It's going to be able to take a lot of punishment."

"Great. Just what I need, heavy combat to waste even more air. Lets get this over with."

The conversation was half a second too long. The thing charged me, and managed to tackle me, and tackling about half a ton of Spartan is no easy task. I managed to shove it off of me, and sent it away with a hard kick to the stomach area. That gave me enough time to get up and go on the offensive. I quickly charged back at it, but instead of going for the tackle, I went for an arm grab and spun around to its back, shoving it up against the cave wall. With three hard face smashings against the wall, it fell to the ground, slightly dazed.

That gave me enough time to grab the Energy Sword and activate it. I don't like fair brawls.

It stopped for a second, looking at the blade warily. He charged at me again, but I was ready this time. With a deep slash across the thing's chest mixed with a sidestep, the alien crashed to the ground. I stabbed the Energy Sword through the thing's head, just to be sure.

With the death of their leader or commander, not sure which one, the dropship fled the scene. Deciding to try to save oxygen as long as possible, I sat down against a cave wall next to the Warthog, to try to slow both my heart rate and my breathing. It was a little while later until I heard a car or something pull up outside the mouth of the cave. It was a minute later when an alien walked around the bend, looking at all the bodies. The thing was wearing a helmet, but I bet its mouth, or whatever passed for one, was open in shock. It looked around the cave more, before it saw me sitting against a wall. The dark armor I was wearing helped me blend in fairly well. It walked over to me and, probably thinking I was either some kind of robot or a corpse, knelt down in front of me, looking me over. After a minute, it straitened up, and turned around, putting a hand up against its head like it was talking over a headset. I took the opportunity it presented me. I quickly activated my active-camo, and slowly stood back up. It had probably just called in reinforcements or something, and I was not going to take that chance. When it turned back around and didn't see me, it paused, giving me the chance I needed.

It froze for a second, a bad mistake. I killed the active-camo and gave it a quick leg sweep, knocking it to the ground, and planted my boot on its chest. I applied enough pressure to keep it down, but not enough to break it. I slowly pulled out my pistol, and lined up on its head, or at least where I thought the head was. Hard to tell with aliens.

Suddenly, just before I fired, a voice said in English, "Put the gun down! Now!" I immediately realized two things. One, that the voice was a human female, and it was not Saria. Two, that me and the alien were no longer alone in the cave.

I looked up and turned my head towards the entrance, and sure enough, there was a woman standing there, two women in fact. The one on the left wore almost black armor with a red stripe going down her right arm. The one on the right wore armor with a similar design, but with different colors, and lacking a stripe down her arm. Something was strange about the second one though. I looked closer, and sure enough, her skin was blue. Either some strange eye job, or it was another alien. I went with the second option.

"I said, put the gun down!" It was the woman on the left that spoke, the assured human. I turned my body slightly to face her, but kept my foot firmly planted on the alien under me.

"You're human." I just needed to be sure.

The woman seemed startled that I spoke, or maybe that I spoke in English. "Uh, yeah, I am. And who are you?"

I avoided the question. "This yours?" I gestured with my pistol to the alien still under my boot.

"Yeah, he is. Are you alright, Garrus?"

With her confirmation, I took my boot off of the alien's chest and let him stand up. He brushed itself off, and looked at the woman, saying something in his native language.

"Good. I can't help but notice that you still haven't answered my question though." The last part was directed at me.

I looked once more at the three beings in front of me, and connected the dots.

"Since you're human, and this planet doesn't have a breathable atmosphere, I think it's safe to assume that you have something sealed, capable of holding oxygen. We can play 20 questions there, I'm starting to run a little low on oxygen."

"Um, sure, follow me."

"Hold on, I need to get some things."

The conversation finished, I walked over to the Warthog and pulled a rucksack from a storage compartment. I then pulled out the seat and put my starch into the bag. One final check, all the armor abilities were there and fine, I hadn't even fired a shot with my assault rifle, and the pistol was only down one bullet. The Energy Blade was at 90% charge. With everything set, I walked out of the cave and into the sun of the unknown planet.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, was longer that i thought it would be. Anyways, next chapter will probably just be a Q&A between Shepard and Thompson. maybe some combat, if not, then definatly the chapter after that. And just if you couldnt tell, the robots were the Geth, the first alien was just some random Krogan, and after that, it was Garrus that Thompson had pinned to the ground while Shepard and Liara watched on.<p>

EDIT: A couple mistakes fixed, some things reworeded. Nothing major.

## 7. Chapter 7

As I stepped out of the cave and into the sun, I noticed their 'car.' It looked like a cross between an APC and a tank. Six wheels, an armored body, and a fairly large turret on top. Perhaps the perfect vehicle to use on hostile planets. The only unknown about the vehicle was speed and stability. Both important with a successful military vehicle.

The three of them were waiting outside what must have been the door to the vehicle. As I walked up, the human opened the door and got in. The other two followed after her. Looking around, and seeing no other options, I got in as well. It was a little cramped inside the vehicle, but then again I am close to seven feet tall. There were three seats against each side wall, and what must have been the driver's seat up by the front. There was no gunner's seat, so the

driver must also control the turret. The three of them were sitting together up against one wall, so I sat down against the other wall, in the middle seat.

The three of them removed their helmets, and I paused for a second to look at them, especially the aliens. The exotic looking one had a face that somewhat reminded me of an Elite, with a slightly elongated head and mandibles over the mouth, two larger mandibles over a human like jaw structure. The other one just looked like a blue skinned human woman, aside from the tendrils on the back of its head where the hair would be. All three of them looked at me somewhat expectantly. I gave a small shrug, and removed my helmet. They seemed stunned.

The blue skinned one chattered something in a decidedly feminine voice. I couldn't tell what it was though. Probably something in its native language. The human in the middle regained her composure first. "Well then, now that we're all settled, lets get down to introductions, shall we? My name is Commander Shepard of the Alliance military. This is Dr. Liara T'Soni," The blue skinned alien, "and Garrus Vakarian." The Elite like one. "If I may ask your's?"

"I'm Spartan Thompson, of the UNSC. And since you decided to ask the first question, I get the follow up. What's the Alliance?"

"What do you mean, 'what's the Alliance?' Its the human government. The Systems Alliance. I thought just about everyone knew that."

"No, the governing body of humanity is the UEG, the United Earth Government, with the UNSC as the military branch. What year is it?"

"It's 2183. Why?"

I thought about it for a second. It was just not matching up. There was never a 'Systems Alliance,' and last time I checked, the year was 2558. I'd never seen aliens like these before, and these people sounded like they had never even heard of the UNSC, not to mention Spartans. I realized that I wasn't in the same reality that I left. I was either sent very far into the future, sent into an alternate timeline in the past, or sent to a whole other universe. Of the three options, the last one seemed most likely. I've never heard of time altering Forerunner devices, but I have been sent large distances in slipspace portals before. Probably wasn't too hard to turn that into a portal to another universe. Just break out on a different side.

"Because where I'm from, it's 2558."

"You're from the future?"

"I don't think so. I've never seen aliens like those, and I know first contact was in 2525. I think I got sent into an alternate universe. I did come through a possibly damaged Forerunner portal device."

"Okay. I'm not sure I believe you, but lets say I did. Do you have any proof of this alternate universe theory of yours?"

I thought about it for a second. Nothing I had on my person could

possibly make her believe me. I could show her the energy sword, or some of the armor ability devices I have, both Forerunner and Covenant, but those wouldn't be definitive. Shepard interrupted my thoughts.

"Nothing? Nothing at all to prove you're just making this up?"

"Aside from my armor, not that I can think of." Then it hit me. "Wait, no. I might have something. Do you have anything capable of playing video?"

"Yes, right over there. What do you want it for?"

"Helmet logs. Will video be enough proof for you?"

"Depends on what I'm looking at."

I picked up my helmet, put it back on, and walked over to the screen. Making sure the external speakers were off, I talked to Saria.

"Can you get in and put footage from the most recent op on the screen?"

"Already on it. Why didn't you mention me to them?"

I thought about the question for a second. "I want to keep a few aces up my sleeve for if things go south. Just in case. Any other theories about where we are?"

"Nope, your idea was pretty much what I came up with. I'm not sure if that was because of the damage, or if this was the device's function."

With that, the video went up on the screen, and I took off my helmet. Probably best if I seem at least somewhat social.

Shepard and the two others watched the video with intense interest. When we entered the chamber, they seemed shocked with the Covenant, staring at the aliens with fascination. Shepard seemed very interested in the plasma that the Covie weapons shot. They seemed surprised when the Prometheans teleported in, and that lasted until the end of the video, cut off right as I fell into the portal

Shepard was the first to recover. "What was that?"

"The op I was on before I wound up here."

"What happened next?"

"I came through the portal, was chased into that cave by some kind of dropship, and held up in there against the assault. The turret on the back of the warthog was a huge help."

"So you killed all those Geth and that Krogan?"

"If the Geth were those robots and the lizard thing was the Krogan, then yes."

Shepard seemed to think about that for a second. "Well, you look like you can fight. And if you are to be believed, then you're stuck here with no way home. How about joining me? I could give you some space on my ship, and besides, I need all the help I can get to take down Saren."

I thought about it for a second, but before I could answer, one of the aliens, Garrus, cut in with something. Shepard replied with a quick "I'm sure, Garrus."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, that's right. If you're from another universe, you probably don't have a translator do you? Do you have an Omni-tool?"

"A what?"

"No? Well, hold on a second, and I'll give you a physical copy of the software."

Shepard pulled out what I assumed to be a data storage device, and then an orange thing appeared over her left arm. I took it to be that Omni-tool thing she was talking about. After a second, she handed me the device, and I pulled on my helmet.

"Saria, can you access the data?"

"Yeah, I'm running tests now. Seems legit, all I can make out is the translating software. Installing now."

A bar appeared on my HUD, and when it was full, it disappeared. Then the HUD rebooted, and when it was done, I made sure to turn the external speakers back on.

"Okay, that should be it."

Liara spoke up. "Does it work?"

That's good. Now I could understand the aliens and they could understand me. Look at me, breaking down language barriers in a matter of seconds.

"Yeah, it works."

Shepard spoke up. "Good. Now, we were on our way to investigate a missing survey team. Maybe you'd like to come."

"Sure. Just leave a beacon here so we can pick up the warthog later. There's still some important supplies in it."

Shepard just gave a quick nod, then got up and walked to the driver's seat, while Garrus got up and walked over to what I assumed was the gunner's seat. The vehicle gave a quick noise, and with a lurch, we were off.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, that took longer then expected. This was probably the hardest chapter to write so far, do to rewrites and a general lack of motivation. Next chapter probably will not be so long in coming out,

but I hold no promises.<p>

EDIT: Minor fixes.

## 8. Chapter 8

The APC hit the ground with a thud, followed by more grumbling from the cockpit up front. I had to hand it to the vehicle. Not many wheeled vehicles could scale a sheer mountain cliff. Even if said vehicle did have jump jets in the undercarriage, it was still impressive.

"This happen often when you explore planets like this?"

Garrus was the one to respond. He seemed like he was less effected by the rough path Shepard seemed intent on following. "All the time. Whenever we get planet side, Shepard seems dead set on taking the shortest path possible- even if that's strait over a mountain."

"Good thing we left the warthog behind. Don't think it would be able to go this way."

Liara looked up at me, the rough road clearly taking its toll on her. "If you don't mind me asking, how do you seem so calm? I mean, this is-" The vehicle caught some air, then slammed down hard. "This isn't exactly an easy road."

I leaned back, hands behind my head, grinning. "Trust me, compared to some of the things I've done, this is a breeze."

Liara seemed confused, but Garrus seemed more interested in what I had said. "What could you have possibly done that puts shame to Shepard's driving?"

Shepard cut me off with a stern "I heard that Garrus!", but didn't seem too annoyed.

"What have I done that's worse than Shepard's driving? Let's see. There was that time I rode a warthog off a collapsing structure across a 30 foot gap into a hangar bay. Or the time a rode half a ship down into an ocean. Or all those times I dropped down from orbit in a pod about half the size of this car. Those were fun."

Shepard joined in on the conversation. "What was that about dropping from orbit?"

Liara was the one to cut me off this time. "Shepard, shouldn't you be focusing on driving?"

"Relax Liara, this isn't too rough." Shepard's response would have been more reassuring if it wasn't punctuated with the car crashing to the ground. "Thompson, answer the question."

"I was an ODST before I was a Spartan. It was the main way we got from ships to engage the enemy on the ground."

"ODST?"

"Orbital Drop Shock Trooper. The best of the best, aside from Spartans."

Shepard seemed satisfied with my answers, but Liara had a few more questions. "What's a Spartan?"

"Spartans are super soldiers. Faster, stronger, and tougher than normal humans."

Shepard seemed interested again. "Super soldier, huh? How super?"

"I guess that's what we're here to find out."

Just then, the vehicle peaked over the mountain, and half drove, half fell down, the research base clearly visible ahead. It looked small, a few prefab sheds, to silos, not much else. We pulled up close to the sheds, and no one came out to greet us.

Liara summed it up the best. "This place looks abandoned."

Shepard thought about it for a second, then decided. "Alright everyone, seal up. We won't find out much from inside the mako. We might as well look around a little bit."

I picked up my helmet from beside me, then put it back on my head, making sure it was sealed. I waited for everyone else to get out, then hopped out behind them. We made our way over to one of the sheds, then Shepard hit the open button. The door opened directly into the rest of the shed, no airlock. Then I realized something. The sheds were all of similar make, all the same size. If this one didn't have an airlock, then probably none of the others did. There weren't any larger buildings here other than the silos, which were probably just used as storage. A guess backed up by the fact that there were a couple of bunks in the back of the shed.

I made sure the speakers were off, then said, "Saria, you notice how these things have no airlocks?"

"Yeah. I was just about to bring that up."

I turned the speakers back on, and brought it up with Shepard. "These sheds don't have airlocks. Maybe they suffocated through their own stupidity?"

Shepard was waiting on Garrus to open a crate. "I doubt even a survey team would be that stupid. They probably had some external supply."

Garrus got the crate opened, and pulled out a small box. I looked over, slightly curious. "What's that?"

Garrus opened the box, and I saw a couple tubes of something, along with a few mechanical parts. "Looks like an armor set. Not sure what a survey team would be doing with military grade armor, but hey, we could use it."

I shrugged. I'm good on the armor side, with the MJOLNIR armor all Spartans used. Thinking of my armor, I realized I forgot the repair kit in the warthog. Oh well, just another reason to go back for it. We moved on to the next shed, found another crate. Similar box



inside, but according to Garrus, it was a shotgun. Not exactly sure how a box of scaps and a tube of liquid could be a suit of armor or a shotgun, but whatever. Not my problem.

The last shed had a terminal in it. Shepard stepped back to let Garrus take a look at it. "According to these data logs, the survey team unearthed some kind of alien technology."

Liara spoke up. "Perhaps we will find more answers at the excavation site."

Shepard nodded. "Good idea. Lets go."

We went outside, and back into the mako. The dig site was a short distance away from the camp. We got out, and I got a look at it. It was little more than a tube going into the side of a mountain with a small ramp leading up to it. We walked up to the door, and again Shepard pushed the 'open' button, but this time there was another door behind it. An airlock. Why they put it to the excavation site and not the sheds, I had no clue, but that did put a rather large hole in my 'died through their own stupidity' theory. On the other side, Shepard and company pulled off their helmets and started down the slanted tube to another door. I followed slightly after. On the other side of the door was a small cave, obviously sealed, but yet there was still water all over the floor. Another door was in the side wall.

On the other side of that was something I was not expecting. There was a group of ten of what I could only describe as 'robot zombies.' Once the others spotted them, they pulled the hunks of metal off their backs, which quickly unfolded out to guns. I pulled the assault rifle of my back, with a quick glance at the display to make sure it had a full mag in it. Garrus gave a quick "Take 'em out!" That was when the things finally noticed us and started charging. Garrus, Liara and I opened fire, Shepard waiting until they got closer with what I assumed was a shotgun.

I was slightly surprised to find that the things were slightly shielded, but thankfully, nowhere near as well as an Elite. They went down fairly quickly. I looked over at the others' guns to see heat radiating out of them. They definitely shot bullets, but it looked like its main limiting factor was heat, not ammo. Weird.

After the things were cleared out, I put a fresh mag in the rifle, then put it on my back. Looking down at the things we just killed I voiced my confusion. "What were those things?"

Garrus spoke up. "I've seen this before. They're machine cultists. The survey team must have unearthed some alien technology that turned them into mindless fanatics."

Shepard appeared thoughtful for a second. "These look like the husks my team and I fought on Eden Prime."

Husks. That seemed a fitting name.

Liara had her two cents as well. "Whatever they found, it is long gone now."

We all wandered throughout the rest of the cave. In the center was a

large, metal claw, black and alien looking, over a bright orb of white light. I moved on. That didn't give any clues as to what happened to the survey team. I noticed two doors in the back of the cave. I made my way back there, the others wandering their way over. When I got close to one of the doors, it opened from the other side. More husks. Great. I pulled a plasma grenade off my belt, armed it, and hurled it at the leading husk. It was apparently harder then I meant to throw it, causing it to stumble back a step into the other husks, just before it exploded.

I heard the other door opening, and I turned, pulling the rifle off my back. Saria gave me a warning, "Nick! Energy buildup behind you!" I turned more, just in time to see Shepard, shrouded in a blue aura, throw what looked like a sphere of energy at the husks. A similar aura came around Liara, and what looked like a mini black hole appeared, picking up all the husks, making them easy targets. They didn't take long to go down.

With the last of the husks down, I turned to face the two. "What was that ... Glowly stuff?"

Shepard thought about it, then gave a noncommittal "It's complicated. I'll explain later. Lets look in those two rooms, see if we can find out what happened to the survey team."

I shrugged. Answers were answers. Whether they were given now or later didn't matter much to me. I'm a patient man.

Inside the two rooms were several tripods with a large spike coming out the middle, rising maybe a foot over my head. They certainly were impressive. Shepard seemed to recognize them.

"Those are the dragon's teeth the Geth used back on Eden Prime. I guess that explains where the husks came from. But these are older than the Geth. Maybe they're not Geth tech?"

No one really had any answers, so deciding that the mystery was solved, we headed back to the surface and got back in the mako, heading to the cave where they picked me up from. I went inside to get the warthog out, while Shepard called their ship. I took some tricky maneuvering, but I was able to get the warthog out of the cave. When I came out, there was a ship hovering overhead. Seemed too small to be a military vessel. Looked weird too. Instead of the blocky design the UNSC favored, this 'System Alliance' seemed to like curves and wings. It was tough getting the warthog into the cargo bay, but we got it in. Before she went on the lift up, Shepard gave me another physical storage device.

"What's on it?"

"The latest version of the Galactic Codex. Should be able to answer any questions you might have. If you have any more questions afterward, feel free to ask."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Now, if you need me, I'll be at the galaxy map, in the CIC. Feel free to take a look around, get to know the crew. You may be here a little while."

Shepard made her way over to the elevator, which slowly rose up to the deck above. I looked around, and found a good place to sit, over out of the way. Making sure the speakers were off, I decided to talk to Saria.

"What have you got from that Galactic Codex, or whatever?"

"It's interesting, I'll give it that much. I've got some entries here you might be interested in."

"Great. Thanks."

The conversation over, and alone for at least a little while, I got comfy and started reading.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, here you go. Next chapter will probably be meeting the crew, learning about the mission, and possibly shopping on the Citadel. And, seeing as Valentine's Day was a few weeks ago, I'll leave you with a vote to honor it.<p>

Vote #2: Romance, shot 1

Who should Shepard start a romance with, if any?

Poll Closed. Check next chapter for results.

## 9. Chapter 9

After what seemed like close to an hour, I decided to take a break from the reading and decided to look around a little bit more. Some more people had come down here while I was reading. The Turian, Garrus or something, was doing something with the Mako. There was a woman standing at a workbench, cleaning rifles. Then, I saw another Krogan, leaning up against the wall, probably sleeping, or just thinking. I was just about to get back to reading when the intercom decided to announce its presence.

"Would the ground team please report to the comm room. That includes our new arrival." It was Shepard. Probably taking introducing me into her own hands. Seeing as how I took the opportunity to just sit around, I guess she's justified. Only problem was that I didn't know where this comm room was.

"You know where it is that we're going?" Saria piped up.

While I was thinking of a response, I saw Garrus stop what he was doing with the Mako, and walk towards the elevator. "No. I figure I'll just follow the Turian. He probably knows where to go."

"Fair enough."

I got up and followed Garrus into the elevator. It was a little cramped, but I didn't mind. What I did mind though was how slow the lift was going. It took long enough to have a quick conversation with Saria.

"Nick, there's something about this place you should

know."

"What?"

"AIs are illegal here."

"Oh. Guess it's a good thing I kept you a secret, huh?"

"Yeah."

I could hear the worry in her voice. "Don't worry. It'll be all right."

For an elevator that seemed to go up only one floor, it took an abnormally long time to do it. I let Garrus step out first, and followed him around a corner and up some stairs. The comm room was just around another corner, with two guards. Why a comm room needed two half asleep guards was anyone's guess.

Inside the comm room was not at all like I thought it would look. I had pictured maybe a small room, able to handle 4 comfortably. Instead, there was a slightly raised walkway sloping down into the room, which opened up into a large circle shape. There were 6 chairs, three on each side of the circle, and three consoles for something, probably comms, directly opposite the door. 4 of the chairs were already filled by a human male, a human female, a female quarian, I think that was it, and Liara, who I now recognized as an Asari. Shepard was leaning up against the consoles, arms crossed.

"Good, you two are here. Now we're just waiting on Wrex."

I took it that Wrex was the Krogan from back in the bay. He didn't seem like a military type. Garrus sat down in one of the chairs, and not wanting to risk destroying the last chair, I just stood somewhat opposite Shepard. She seemed to notice.

"That chair right over there is still open, you know."

"I know. It doesn't look strong enough to support me."

"What do you mean?"

"When you weigh nearly half a ton in armor, you get used to standing real fast."

"Oh." Was all I got in return. Luckily, Wrex chose just this moment to walk into the comm room, halting the increasingly awkward conversation. He sat down in the last chair as the Commander stood a little straighter.

"Well, now that everyone's here," She took a second to glare at Wrex, who just gave a deep chuckle. "Let's get down to introductions. Thompson, you go first?"

I shrugged. "Sure. I'm Spartan Nick Thompson of the UNSC Spartan branch. Supersoldier extraordinaire."

The man spoke up. "Spartan? Is that a military rank?"

"Sort of. It's more of a designation than a rank. My actual rank is

probably somewhere around a Sargent Major. Roughly equivalent to your rank of Gunnery Chief."

Shepard took advantage of the brief pause to get the conversation back under her control. "So, Kaiden, how about you introduce yourself, and we'll work our way around."

The man, Kaiden, was the one who responded. "Yes, ma'am. I'm Lieutenant Kaiden Alanko."

The other woman spoke next. "Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams."

The quarian looked around nervously, or what I thought was nervously, and realized that everyone was waiting on her. "I'm Tali'Zorah nar Rayya. But you can just call me Tali."

The Krogan was next, and all he did was rumble "Urdrnot Wrex."

Shepard once again took control. "Now, that the introductions are done, could you answer a few questions?"

I shrugged. "Sure."

"Good. First question. What were those aliens you were fighting in the vid?"

I knew that one was going to be first. "The little ones were Grunts. The bird ones with shields were Jackals. The big ones were Elites. The really big ones were Hunters. Or at least, that's what we called them. They were part of the terrorist group that formed after the Covenant was disbanded five or six years ago."

I could see Shepard thinking, trying to decide which question to decide on next. Finally, she settled on one. "The Covenant?"

I sighed. This was going to be a long one. "You all know that I think I came from an alternate universe, right?" There was a few nods around the room. "Here's why. We achieved inter-system transportation later than you, because there were no mass relays or element zero." That brought a gasp or two, and looks of confusion all around. "We made something else. A slipspace drive. It basically created a wormhole to another dimension, where the laws of physics don't quite apply. Using this, we weren't limited the way you were by only using the mass relays. We could go almost anywhere, it just took a long time, and was a little unpredictable. Anyway, eventually, we had over 800 colonies by 2490. We had been in space for almost 100 years by then, and we still had yet to make any contact with another sentient species. Until 2525.

That year, we made contact with a union of several alien species, those that you saw in the vid, and a few others, that called themselves the Covenant. We attempted first contact. They shot our ships down and burned one of our colonies." More gasps. "And when I say burned, I mean burned to a cinder, burned so bad large portions of the surface were turned to glass. At that time, the UNSC didn't have shields or anything of that nature. We were using ballistic weaponry, massive slugs magnetically launched at high speeds and swarms of missiles. The Covenant had shields, and plasma weaponry, capable of burning through the toughest armor plates on our ships in

three seconds. Using that same plasma weaponry, they were capable of 'glassing' our colonies through orbital bombardment. In space, we never stood a chance.

I found out later what was driving the Covenant on their genocide of the human race. They were primarily motivated by a religion that said that an ancient species called the Forerunners, long extinct, left behind artifacts of transcendence, that when activated, would send all those who believe on a 'Great Journey' to godhood. The species in charge of the Covenant, the Prophets, believed that the gods chose them to lead their followers to godhood. There was just one problem in that view. They had found out from an ancient machine left behind by the Forerunners that humans were their chosen inheritors, not the Prophets. The three High Prophets, Truth, Mercy, and Regret, decided to keep this information from everyone else and declare humanity to be sin incarnate in an attempt to hold on to their power.

And so, nearly thirty years of war followed. Humanity was on the defensive the entire time, going up against a by far technologically superior foe. We were able to almost hold them on the ground, we were roughly evenly matched. This was mostly through the efforts of the best of the best, the Spartans. Stronger, faster, tougher, possibly smarter, and certainly better protected than anyone else on the battlefield, they were what saved us on the ground. They were thrown at impossible situations, and always came out on top. Did I mention that there were about thirty of them? If we had more, we might have been able to turn the tide, to stop them, but that was all we had. Not that the victories on the ground mattered much.

No matter what we did, we were always outmatched by the Covenant in space. Usually, if we were able to hold them, or push them back on the ground, they would abandon their objective, probably something about obtaining the 'holy relics' they could detect from their ships that they thought we were destroying, 'holy relics' that they didn't realize they were murdering by the platoon, by the city. They would cut their losses, retreat to their ships, and just glass the planet, killing anyone left on it. It went on like that for years, them hunting down our colonies and burning them to a crisp, no matter what we did to stop them. Until they found our last major military outpost aside from Earth, the planet Reach. The fighting on the ground went on for months, with far off fleets arriving in system as fast as they could to try to beat off the Covenant. In the end, there was nothing we could do. Reach fell, and many ships were destroyed. I managed to escape the planet on one of the last ships to leave."

Shepard decided to interrupt right as I was nearing the climax of my tale. "If the odds were that low, and the enemy that superior, why didn't you just give up?"

"There was no giving up, no surrender. That just meant that we would die then instead of the small hope that we could fight them off. The Covenant took no prisoners, accepted no surrender. They butchered everyone, military and civilians alike. We could only fight.

Anyway, that ship, the Pillar of Autumn, carried one of the last hopes of humanity. One of the last remaining Spartans, most of the others having fallen in battle, was on that ship. He was a living legend, the absolute best of the best. No, it wasn't me, I wasn't a Spartan back then. Almost nobody knew his real name, they just called him by his rank, or his number. Master Chief, Spartan 117. While

fleeing the destruction of Reach, we went on a random slipspace jump, part of protocol in an attempt to delay the discovery of Earth and the remaining colonies. We came out of slipspace in a system, with an entire armada of Covenant ships seemingly waiting for us. We found out what they were really there for though, one of the artifacts the Forerunners left behind, one of the ones that would bring along transcendence to all who believed. A massive artificial ringworld the Covenant called Halo. The ship, already damaged from the battle over Reach, was boarded by Covenant forces and damaged further, forcing it to crash land on Halo. Most of the crew and soldiers escaped through the lifeboats, but my crew and I weren't most soldiers. We geared up, and got down onto the battlefield our normal way. Feet first. Launched from a ship in low orbit in what could very well become your coffin.

When we regrouped back on the ground, we discovered two things. One, the Master Chief had also made it off the Autumn. Two, the Captain of the ship, Captain Jacob Keyes, had been captured by the Covenant. So some other soldiers and I met up with the Chief, who had the ship's AI-

Tali suddenly cut me off as soon as she heard AI. "You people uses AIs!?"

"Yes, we do. Without them, we wouldn't have lasted as long against the Covenant as we did. And that particular AI was the one who stopped the Chief and me from accidentally killing us all."

Shepard broke in there. "What was that?"

"I'll get there in a second. So we met up with the Chief and Cortana, that was her, the AI's, name," Tali was still glaring at me through the visor of her helmet. I had no idea why, "and we stormed the ship where they were keeping Keyes. We rescued him and got him out of there, and gave us a new objective. Find the control room of Halo before the Covenant. He figured that if the Covenant wanted it, that was reason enough to keep the, from having it. So we went off to find the Silent Cartographer, the map machine of the Halo. We found it, and got as close as we could to the control room from the air, then fought our way there through hordes of Covenant. When we got to the control room, Chief plugged in Cortana so she could try to get some intel from the ring's computer systems. It was about a minute later that she sent us to hurry after the Captain to make sure that he didn't do whatever it was that he was about to do. So we flew off to a bunker in the middle of a swamp, and fought through very light Covenant resistance to the entrance, and made our way inside to find Keyes. Aside from the Covenant near the entrance, the entire bunker was empty, except for one severely traumatized soldier who tried to shoot us and wouldn't stop babbling what we thought was nonsense. Eventually we made our way to a room with a dead marine just inside the door. Chief took a look at the man's helmet logs from the recorder, and we found that we were too late. The Captain had already come in, and his team was ambushed by something, in the same room we were standing in. The video showed most of the soldiers die, but aside from the dead marine and one lone helmet that we took the logs from, the room was empty. No bodies, no nothing. Then, just as we were about to leave, they came back. The things that 'killed' the Captain and his troops. The monster the Covenant woke, the monster the Captain unleashed. I still have nightmares about them, about that room. I'm pretty sure the Chief does too, even if he won't admit it.

We fought our way out of that bunker, and while we were trying to fight them off for evac, some robots came and helped us fight them off. A Forerunner AI came too, and told us that it needed our help to get rid of the Flood, the monsters.

The Forerunner AI, 343 Guilty Spark, the Monitor of the ring, took us to a place he called the Library, a place that was crawling with Flood. He told us we had to fight our way through the Flood and find something he called the Index, which would allow us to activate Halo, which was really a weapon against the Flood. Along the way, we discovered that Spark was not exactly ... sane. Anyway, once we got the Index, he teleported us back to the control room. When we went to activate the ring, Cortana popped up and stopped the activation."

I heard Tali mutter under her breath, "I knew it."

"She then told us exactly how Halo stops the Flood, an answer that we never got from Spark. Halo was not a weapon aimed at the Flood, it was a weapon aimed at it's food source. Any sentient species would be wiped out, as the ring, and the six others in the array, fired. The Forerunners had created it as a weapon of last resort against the Flood, an enemy that they couldn't defeat. So, in an attempt to save what they could from the Flood, they sacrificed themselves and fired the array. That was over a hundred thousand years ago."

That stopped everyone dead in their tracks, even Wrex.

"When we realized that Halo wasn't a weapon against the Flood, that it was a gun pointed at the head of the galaxy, we decided we needed to find another way to stop the Flood. Spark disagreed. Violently. We grabbed Cortana, and made our way out of their, fighting the Covenant, the Flood, and Spark's Sentinels. We managed to delay Spark along the way, and teleported to where the Captain was, so we could get his neural implant to get the access codes to blow the \_Autumn's\_ reactors, destroying the ring. We found the Captain partially absorbed by the Flood, being 'interrogated' for the location of more 'food'. We got the codes and made our way to the ship, where we set the reactors to catastrophically meltdown, destroying the ring. We managed to escape in a fighter, pick up the last human survivors, one of which was a Spartan cryogenically frozen due to critical injuries, and hijack a Covenant ship, picking up the last survivors on Reach thanks to a marginally time bending Forerunner artifact, and eventually make our way back to Earth, our last major stronghold, one armed to the teeth.

Then, a Covenant fleet found Earth. It had passed several remaining colonies to get there, and it was fairly small, obviously not expecting much combat. We found out later that it followed Forerunner coordinates to get there, and they didn't expect us to be on the planet that their gods left a priceless artifact on. We managed to drive the fleet off and have some ships follow them through slipspace, and we arrived at another Halo. We arrived, and we fought our way through the forces on the ground to get to one of their leaders, Regret, who led the attack on Earth. Chief managed to kill him, before we were both captured by the Gravemind, the leader of the Flood. It had also captured a high ranking Elite, known as the Arbiter, and convinced him that the 'Great Journey' was a lie, and of the Halo Array's true purpose. This was happening at the same time that an internal revolution was going in on the Covenant, with the Prophets tossing aside the Elites in favor of the Brutes. The Elites,



feeling betrayal from the Prophets from both their actions and the lie of the 'Great Journey', rebelled and allied with us to fight the Covenant. The Gravemind offered a temporary truce between the Elites and Humans and the Flood to stop the ring from firing and killing everyone. Master Chief went to High Charity, the Covenant's floating spaceship of a capital, kind of like a larger, more mobile Citadel, and stop the remaining Prophets. The Arbiter and I were sent to the Library to try to find the Index before the Covenant could get it to fire the ring. One Prophet managed to escape High Charity, which the Gravemind was infecting with Flood, and the Chief was able to hitch a ride back to Earth. While this was going on, the Arbiter and I found that we were too late, and that the Brute leader had taken both the Index and the Commander of the ship we came in on to the control room. We followed him in an armored assault platform, and just barely managed to stop him in time. As it was, he managed to put all the rings on standby, ready to fire at a moment's notice. That was how close we were. Somehow we managed to get back to Earth before the Chief, just after the last Prophet's fleet bypassed what was left of the defenses and started digging for something.

We met up with the Chief again and tried to stop Truth, the Prophet, before he could find what he was looking for. We thought it was the Ark, a Forerunner device that would be able to remotely activate all the Halos, but we got lucky. Turns out it was just a portal to the Ark. We gathered our fleets, and just before we were able to follow Truth, a Flood infested ship crashed on Earth. We had to glass part of Africa to stop the infestation."

Garrus was the one who interrupted me this time. "Was the truly necessary? Reducing part of your homeworld to glass to stop one ship?"

"You don't understand how dangerous the Flood was. One single spore could destroy an entire species, possibly even all civilization like what happened to the Forerunners if you're not careful. Best to err on the side of caution, rather than doom your species, right?"

We followed Truth to the Ark, but the Flood had followed both of us through as well. The Flood once again proposed a temporary alliance to stop Truth from activating the rings, something we barely managed to do, and even so, our Commander ended up dead. And even then, we still had to find a way to stop the Flood. Fortunately, on the Ark, there was an unfinished Halo ring being built as a replacement for the one that we destroyed, still unconnected to the array. We needed to find a way to activate it to kill the Flood, and the Chief had a plan. Back when he was escaping High Charity, he had left Cortana behind to try to stop the rings from firing. The Gravemind had brought High Charity to the Ark as it's base of operations. Chief went in to rescue Cortana from the Gravemind. We were still in luck. Cortana still had the Index from the first Halo, the one that we destroyed. We went to the ring and fought our way through the Flood to the control room, to try to fire the ring, as all the Flood were on either the ring or the Ark, and the Ark was way outside the galaxy. There would be no collateral damage. We got to the control room, and we prepared to fire the ring. However, Spark, who had survived the first ring and had helped us out on the second one, disagreed with us once again. The ring would shake itself apart as it fired, destroying it again. He wanted us to wait, and we didn't have the time to wait. Spark managed to kill Sargent Johnson, who had been with the Chief and I since the beginning, back on the first Halo. It

took a massive amount of firepower, but we managed to bring Spark down. We activated the ring, and made our way back to the only ship left on this side of the portal, the Forward unto Dawn. With the ring collapsing around us, ready to fire, we barely made it. The Arbiter, who had been with us since the second Halo, and I made our way to the front end of the ship to bring us back to Earth. Only problem is, something went wrong. The portal seemed to collapse in on itself, and only the front half of the Dawn made it through. Master Chief and Cortana were stuck drifting in space for years while the Arbiter and I crashed down on Earth. The war ended not long after that."

Shepard seemed stunned, not to mention the rest of them. "That was a truly interesting tale. I certainly make like our First Contact War look like a small skirmish compared to yours. One last question. How many did you lose?"

I thought about this for a second. "No one really knows. Whether its inability, or fear, to count the bodies, no one has done it. All I really know is that we went from over 800 colonies to maybe a couple dozen, most small. We lost billions in the war. It's not something I want to do again."

She nodded. "Fair enough. What we're trying to do here is stop a similar fate. I know you already said you'll help, but I need to make sure."

I nodded. "I'm in. You can count on me, ma'am."

"Good. Just so you know, we're on our way back to the Citadel for supplies. We could probably pick up an onmitool for you there, as well as any other supplies you might need. All of you, dismissed."

And with that, the meeting was over. We all filed out and headed back to our own little corners of the ship. I headed back down to the bay and back to my little stack of crates, and started reading some more.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, sorry that took so long. I would say that it was because of the extraordinarily long chapter, almost double the lenght of the previous record holder, but thats not it. I just happen to have the right blend of lazyness and forgetfulness that sometimes makes it hard to get things done. Anyways, to help make up for it, I've given you this double length chapter, even if most of it is just a recap of the original Halo trilogy. I've also gotten you not one, not three, but two new polls, as well as the results from the previous poll. Seems you guys want Shepard to wait. Understandable. The selection is a bit limited right now. Though romancing Liara did come in a very close second. One vote behind in fact. You guys must hate Kaiden. Anyways, on to the new votes!<p>

Vote #3: Morality

I'm going to probably try something new, and my original plan of asking you guys to vote at every major choice isn't going to fit into that. So, how would you guys like Shepard to act?

Vote closed.

#### Vote #4: Chapters

Like i said, i want to try something new. I figured I'd run it by you first. What I'm proposing is kind of like what just happened. I write as much as i can for a month, then upload what I've got at the end of the month, maybe splitting it off into several chapters if i have a lot. This will result in longer chapters, but also longer waiting time between uploads. Or I could continue what I have been doing, and upload a chapter, usually shorter, probably only part of a main mission, when I finish it. Shorter wait, but a shorter ride. Either way, I'm going to try the new method for next month, see how it works. Your vote will kick in after that.

Vote closed.

Don'te afraid to vote. I like your input. It keeps me from having to make these decisions myself. Anyways, happy reading, vote, and Happy Easter (if you celebrate it).

## 10. Chapter 10

There was one thing bothering me though, something distracting me from truly absorbing the info I was reading. Something about the debriefing earlier. Something I could not get off my mind. I checked to make sure the external speakers were off before speaking.

"Saria, I know AIs are illegal here, but do you have any idea why?"

"No. There isn't any explanation, other than the fact that the law mainly came about due to some action the Quarrians took. No clue what it was though. Maybe it's time for some deeper intel gathering?"

All I gave was a noncommittal "Maybe," before I got up from the stack of crates that had quickly become my area of the bay. Seems like no one wants to mess with the armored, seven foot tall super soldier. I can't possibly imagine why. After a second of indecision, I decided to walk over to where Williams was working, see if she knew anything about why Tali had reacted how she did in the comm room.

I walked up behind Williams, who seemed to be cleaning or otherwise caring for the guns. Realizing that she still hadn't noticed me, I cleared my throat a little, to catch her attention.

"Wha- Whoa! But you were," she glanced over to where I was sitting before, then took a deep breath to calm herself. I heard both Wrex and Garrus give a quiet chuckle, probably not something Ashley could hear. "You sure can move quietly in that thing if you want to, huh? I thought it weighed half a ton?"

I shrugged. "I weigh half a ton in the armor. As for moving quietly, it takes about a week to get used to moving quietly after the augmentations, and a little longer than that for the armor. Helps having great balance and being able to process things faster. Anyways, I didn't walk over just to scare you. I wanted to ask you something."

"Sure. What is it?"

"Two things actually. First: do you know what was up with Tali up in the comm room. I know AIs are illegal here, but that didn't seem like a typical reaction."

"That is probably something you'll want to bring up with her. She's usually in the engine room, poking around with the drive core. What was the second thing?"

"I was wondering if you'd let me have one of those guns, to take apart and get an idea of how it works. I like knowing how most of my kit works, and if those guns can fold up, I can probably fit one in addition to my guns."

"Sure, I'll get one. You want anything specific, like an assault rifle, pistol, sniper rifle, or shotgun?"

"Shotgun sounds fine. I already have an assault rifle and a pistol, and if things get up close, hitting them is fine and all, but I want to have a longer effective range than my fist."

"Okay, I'll grab a shotgun for you. Just, you didn't say anything about long range. You sure you don't want a sniper too?"

"No, I'm good, with long range as well. Pistol has a smart link 2x smart scope. Besides, I can only fit one more gun. Might as well be the shotgun."

She eyed the pistol on my thigh with a critical eye. "If that thing has a scope, then I'm a Spectre."

"Well, I'll give you half credit. It has a scope, just probably not the kind you can use. The smart link scope is under the barrel, and connects to the armor, especially the HUD. While I can't physically look through the scope, I can trigger a 2x zoom through the HUD, linked to the camera in the scope. Means I don't actually have to bring the gun up to my face to look down the scope."

She gave a whistle. "I stand corrected. Anyways, here's your shotgun, and if you want to talk to Tali, she's in the engine room. Just through those doors behind the elevator."

I gave a small nod. "Thanks."

Stopping by my crates to drop off the gun, I made my way to the engine room. Once inside, I realized that this looked nothing like I expected. I had expected maybe something similar to a ship's reactor, or maybe a room housing something similar to a slipspace drive. Not a slightly lowered platform overlooking a spinning turbine surrounding a massive three pronged claw with some kind of glowing blue energy in the middle, with regular electric pulses down the turbine.

"That must be the Element Zero core. It's bigger than I expected."

I just gave a simple "Yeah" to Saria's comment, and looked around the room some more. There was probably 4 humans in the room, two of them having a conversation off to the side, and the other two working at glowing orange holographic consoles overlooking the drive core. Off to the left, somewhat away from everyone else, also monitoring a

console, was the person I was looking for. Tali.

I walked up to her, but like Ashley, she didn't notice me. So instead of just clearing my throat, I spoke up. "Tali?"

She turned around, startled by my seemingly sudden appearance. "Keelah! Are you always so quiet?"

I gave a small chuckle. "That's the same reaction Ashley had when I went to talk to her."

"So, are you here to talk to me about something?"

"Yeah, actually. I wanted to know why you reacted how you did when I mentioned that the UNSC used AIs. It seemed beyond a normal reaction against something that's illegal."

She sighed. "You don't know? The Quarians created the Geth. Rouge AIs that rebelled against us and drove us from our homeworld. That's why we have to live on the Migrant Fleet. We were driven from our home, and because of our immune systems, we have to live in our suits, and can't even think about colonizing a planet. AIs are dangerous."

I thought about that for a second. "Valid point. I still have a few questions though. How are Geth created, how do they function?"

"The Geth are a community of programs working together. While individually, the Geth are not intelligent, when they network together with enough other Geth, they get smarter. Of course, that's a simplification of how they work, but you get the general idea."

"Okay, I think I get it. The Geth are programs working together to achieve intelligence. That's nowhere close to how UNSC AIs work."

"So how do they work?"

"I'm not an expert, but I have the basic principle. Our AI techs are not as advanced as yours were, they didn't know how to program a true AI, one that could adapt to any challenge. But they did know something that could: the human brain. AIs are created by releasing an electrical pulse through a relatively intact brain, and mapping the pattern. This is then used through some process to create an AI. Our AIs can be considered human, due to how they think. They are essentially digitalized human brains. Why would they want to betray what they view as their own species?"

"I suppose. But that doesn't prevent them from say, venting all the atmosphere from a ship."

"You ever hear of a human named Asimov? No? He was an ancient science fiction writer back in the 20th century, at least where I'm from. He created these ideas, ideas about what the central programming of a robot, or an AI, should be. He had three laws on how they should behave. Number 1 said that they can't harm human beings, or through inaction, allow one to be harmed. Number two said that it must always follow orders, as long as it doesn't conflict with the first law. The third one said that it must protect its own existence, as long as it doesn't conflict with the other laws."

"Asimov was a smart man. What does a dead man's ideas about governing robots have to do with your AIs?"

"UNSC AIs have Asimov's Laws of Robotics as part of their core programming. The only ones able to ignore the laws for a short time would be military AIs, to prevent issues with orders. But even then, they can only ignore the Laws if they are operating at full capacity. UNSC AIs would try everything they could to try to prevent humans being harmed, both because of the Laws, and because they think like humans. AIs have human holographic avatars because they think of themselves as human."

"Okay, I get it. Your AIs are safe because you took precautions. What's to stop the AIs from changing their base code?"

"Can you change your DNA? It the same idea. While you can change some features about yourself, like strength or endurance, by building it up, AIs can change parts of themselves, but not basic subroutines or commands installed in their core programming. It would be like you trying to change your need to breath."

"Okay, okay. Is there anything else you need, or did you just come here to brag about your AIs?"

"I wasn't trying to brag, just trying to make you understand. And yes, there may be something else. You seem like a fairly capable engineer, am I right?"

"All Quarrians are, we have to be when we live on a home one hull breach away from death."

"Good. I have some special equipment with me that I can't fix or replace, and isn't reusable. Do you know how I might be able to get more?"

She seemed to be deep in thought, and paced back and forth a little while trying to come up with an answer. "There might be something. Omnitools come with a standard microfabricator, and if you have the right schematics, you might be able to use Omnigel to create what it is that you need. What is it that you need? Can I see it?"

"Yeah, sure. I need a reliable source of ammo for my assault rifle and the pistol." I pulled out a spare magazine for my pistol and handed it to her. She took a long look at it, and almost laughed.

"You have highly advanced AIs, ones that are theoretically safe, and your running around with bullets? Why not just use Eezo for your guns?"

"Your idea of using Eezo in our guns hinges on a critical detail: there has to actually be Eezo where I'm from for that to actually work."

She looked like she was about to laugh again, until my words sunk in. "You don't have Eezo where your from?"

I shook my head. "Nope. We don't have Eezo, we don't have mass relays, nothing the people here take for granted."

"But you said that your people had over 800 colonies before the Covenant came. How did you get around? If you didn't use Eezo, how did you get out there?"

"Multiple reasons. First, we weren't limited with space like you are by the mass relays. We spread out from our homeworld along our lines, not anyone else's. Also, for faster than light travel, we have slipspace drives, which created micro black holes in front of the ship, then enlarged it, tearing a hole into another dimension. That other dimension, what we call Slipspace, follows different rules. You still have to travel under your own power, but the rules work a little differently. Still takes a long time to go from place to place, so we created cryotubes. They stop almost all aging on a cellular level, effectively putting you to sleep for the journey. What feels like a five minute nap can actually be a several month trip through slipspace. It's not as fast as the mass relays, but its faster than your normal FTL drives here."

"Keelah, a way to move faster without Eezo. Do you have any plans for this? This might be exactly what I need for my Pilgrimage!"

"Sorry, I don't have any plans for a slipspace drive. Maybe a few weapons, but no slipspace drive."

"Oh well, I suppose it's too much to ask."

"Not really, almost every ship uses slipspace drives. They're about as classified as a ship's Eezo core. Well, thanks for the help Tali, it was nice talking with you."

I walked back out of the engine room, and back to my usual stack of crates. With the shotgun laid out on a crate, I took a scan of it using the Forerunner scanner, both in its folded position, and extended. Satisfied that I had enough data to be able to put it back together again if I needed help, I took my helmet off, but put it in a position that would still allow it to record what I was doing. Having recorders built in to your helmet was a good thing.

The gun wasn't complicated, obviously designed to be simple for both maintenance and a general understanding of how the gun worked. From what I was able to tell, it didn't use magazine of bullets, instead simply shaving off a piece from an internal block, then, using a small Eezo core to lower the mass even further, shoot it out the barrel using magnetic accelerators. Similar in principle to the railgun that infantry used out on the field, but with a much smaller, nonexplosive, and more regular payload.

It was on the third cycle of taking it apart and rebuilding it that Shepard showed up. She seemed interested in what I was doing.

"So, what do you think? That gun up to your standards?"

"While the construction is interesting, and the speed of the bullets is impressive, it lacks armor piercing or stopping power capabilities. It might work here, but wouldn't put down, say, an Elite."

"That bad, huh?"

"It shoots fast, but the mass of the bullet, not to mention the size, tends to limit it. It might have been able to pierce my old ODST BDU, but not the MJOLNIR. At least, the plates. The undersuit could probably protect against a few shots, but not much more than that."

"Wait, your guns use bigger and heavier bullets? How?"

"No Eezo. Ask Tali if you want more info, I told her a lot. She seemed interested with the idea of a non Eezo way of moving through the stars."

Shepard looked impressed. "I can imagine. Now, I wanted to ask you something."

"What?"

"Back in the Mako, you said something about Orbital Drop Shock Troopers? What did you mean?"

"ODSTs are a special forces section of the UNSC marine corps. A couple divisions worth. Rapid deployment is the name of the game. Like I said, we get launched in pods from ships in orbit. Specifically, Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicles, or SOEIVs. Also called Human Entry Vehicles, or HEVs. Vehicle is pushing it though. They're little more than chairs in a metal pod built to survive re-entry."

"Atmospheric re-entry in a small metal pod? That must be dangerous. Especially with AA fire."

"Yeah, it can get dangerous some times. Picked off by a lucky AA gunner, or have your shoot break, and continue down without slowing down, digging your own grave. If you're really unlucky, the thermal coating could fail, and you get roasted in your pod."

"And command expects regular troops to just go along with this?"

"No. Like I said, this was just a couple divisions of the marines. Not all of them. Most marines ride down to the surface in a nice, cushy dropship. And the Helljumpers is a voluntary outfit. Only volunteers. It takes a special kind of crazy to willingly sign up for a job that requires you to do that on a regular basis." I gave a slightly crazy grin to enforce the idea.

"Great. I've got a psychotic Krogan biotic, a Turian with a hatred of the red tape, a Quarian with a delicate immune system, and now a crazy supersoldier, all with free run of my ship. Nothing could possibly go wrong with that combination."

That got a chuckle from me. "Don't worry. I'm sane. Or at least, more sane than most ODSTs. The drops are a pure rush, but I know how dangerous they are. Probably the reason I never made it past Sargent. I wasn't crazy enough. And that's not the only reason to sign up. ODSTs get better training and the best equipment outside of the Spartans and ONI spooks. We sometimes even get some things before the Spartans, like the VISR system. That was introduced to the Spartans around the time the IVs first came into active duty. ODSTs had it in the later part of the war."



"VISR? What's that?"

"A mix between low-light vision and visual intelligence. It connected with the motion tracker and IFF reader to put an outline around anything in vision. As one of my old CO's once said, 'Its simple: If you see green, squad up. If you see red, shoot.' Really comes in handy. After the war, it was made part of standard programming for any unit with a helmet and HUD."

"Well, Nick, I have to say, this has certainly been ... Interesting. We'll be pulling into the Citadel in an hour. I want you to go with Tali, and she'll get you an Omnitoool. Probably better than wearing your helmet all the time."

"Depends on who you ask, Commander. I'll be ready when we get there."

"Okay, just letting you know. Just try to keep your cool, the Citadel is the home of the ruling Council. Try not to piss them off."

The conversation finished, Shepard walked off. I finished putting the gun back together, then, with a lack of more things to do, and bored with taking the gun apart, I figured a quick check of the equipment that I brought with me was in order. First, the guns. With a quick strip down, looking for any problems, I quickly cleared the assault rifle and moved on to the pistol. No problems with either. I pulled my helmet back on and moved on to the Energy Sword. With no other way to perform diagnostics, I gripped the handle, checking the battery charge. 90%. With no way to charge it here, I figured that it would be best to save the charge. I might need it later. Next was the armor abilities I brought with me, currently in a bag next to the crates. Barring the ones that couldn't safely be used in a ship, I checked all that I could. Hardlight Shield, check. Hologram, check. Regen Field, check. Promethian Vision, check. The Autosentry, Jetpack, and Thrusters weren't exactly safe to test on the limited space of the deck. Times like this made me wish for the Holodeck back on the Infinity, even of it did usually have the effect of leaving me beat.

I could tell the others in the bay were watching me run through the tests, interested, but I could care less. Satisfied that they all worked, I put the ability modules back in the bag, and put the active camo back on my back. Never knew when that could come in handy, especially on what is most likely a civilian station. The hour before docking went by pretty quick. Before I knew it, we were pulling into dock at the Citadel.

\* \* \*

><p>Hey, sorry this is a few days late. Schoolwork, not enough time, laziness, you know, the usual? Anyways. about the posting. I decided to come up with a decent compromise. I'll upload the chapters once I finish them, but try to make them longer than they have been in the past, around or longer than this one. If a month goes by, I'll cut my losses and wrap up and upload what I have. Seems fair, right? Quick explanations about the future of this story. I will be breaking up the story between the games, roughly around the endings, maybe with some stuff afterwards. This, in addition to giving me a chance to take a small break between the games, allows for some time skips

without having to explain everything happening between them, making my job easier. This also explains the no pairings I added to the description. No pairings for the course of ME1, but we'll see what happens during the later stories. Those wondering about the overall ending though, don't. All I know is that right now, it will most likely not follow ME3's endings. How it will be different, I'm not exactly sure. I have some ideas about how they fit together, but I guess we'll all find out exactly how it goes when the story gets there. Next chapter, the Spartan meets some new people.<p>

## 11. Chapter 11

With the ship docked, I figured it would be good to pack up my things while I was gone. Less chance of someone doing something stupid with them. I kept my guns with my, as well as the energy sword. I don't like being unarmed. When I stepped into the elevator and pressed the button, I realized I would probably have a little bit of a wait ahead of me. The elevator was slow enough that I was able to have a conversation just waiting for it to go up one floor.

"Saria, do you have any weapon specs stored?"

"A few, yes. I also have a charger for the sword, so you should be able to keep using it. Why?"

"We're currently parked outside the biggest station around, and I figured we could get some supplies, maybe make a few more familiar weapons. That sword charger would be a bonus. What weapon specs do you have?"

In stead of telling me, she showed me through the HUD. Looking at what she had, I gave a low whistle. In addition to what must be one of my favorite guns in the UNSC arsenal from the war, there was also specs for Warthog mounted weapons, like the LAAG currently mounted on the 'Hog, or a Gauss Cannon. That would come in handy if I need to repair the gun, or switch it out for a heavier weapon.

Saria cut into my admiring the schematics. "Are these good enough?"

"Yeah. Those will come in handy."

Any further conversation was ended when the lift finally made it up to the main deck. I quickly made my way up the stairs to the CIC, then moved forward to where the airlock was, where either Tali was waiting, or I would wait for her.

When I got up there, Shepard was talking with the pilot.

"I'm just saying, Commander, are you sure trusting this guy is such a great idea? I mean, if half of what he says is true, he could probably kill us all. And if not, he's insane."

"Come, on Joker, relax a bit. This guy's obviously got military training, and some pretty advanced armor. That might rule out the crazy part, his story at least. Besides, you trust a Krogan mercenary on this ship. Just think of the Spartan as a military figure. He probably won't kill everyone on the ship."

I decided to butt into the conversation as well. "And besides," I started, obviously startling the two. "If I really wanted to kill everyone, I would have done it before, not when we're pulling into the center of civilization for you. Also, I haven't really fought against people who can throw me across the room with their mind. That might delay me a little."

Joker just look a little unsettled at that. "Great. The killing machine heard me. I'm on his list now. So much for 'I'm the only one who can fly this ship.'"

Shepard wisely decided to end the conversation before it could get worse. "Just drop it, you two. This conversation won't end well."

Joker just gave a clipped, "Aye, Commander," and went back to work as Shepard and I walked back out of the cockpit.

"Is he always like that?" I was wondering. Not the usual attitude pilots back home had.

"Not really. Usually he's more upbeat. I'm fairly sure he doesn't mean half of what he says at any given time. Wonder what's taking Tali so long?"

"My guess, the elevator." At the glare she shot me, I elaborated. "What? I didn't break it. I was just saying it was slow, that's all."

Just then, we could see the elevator doors open and Tali step out. She quickly made her way towards us. Once she got to us, we all stepped into the airlock, waited a second as the atmosphere equalized, and stepped out. At the end of the short bridge to the main walkway, a man in a blue uniform was waiting for us. I assumed that he was some kind of high ranking officer for the Alliance military, but I couldn't be sure. The only ranking member of the Alliance military I had for reference was Shepard, and she doesn't seem that big on uniforms.

The officer saluted. "Rear Admiral Mikhailovich, Fifth Fleet." I guess that confirmed my suspicions.

Shepard immediately snapped to attention, raising a hand in salute. "We weren't told to expect you, sir. I would have prepared a formal greeting." It took a lot of effort to not join her, as the admiral was not in the UNSC, therefore not over me, but I was only partly successful. I didn't give a salute, but I did stand a little straighter.

The admiral wasn't amused. "Spare me the pleasantries. I command the 63rd Scout Floatila. You and the Normandy were slated for my unit after shakedown. Then the Council got their paws ... Claws. Tentacles. Whatever. They got them on our ship. And you. "

If Shepard was annoyed at that last part, she didn't show it. "I still serve the Alliance, sir. As a Spectre, I can advance our interests to the Council."

Mikhailovich didn't seem convinced. He gave a small snort, followed by, "Do you still know what color your blood is, Shepard?"

Shepard didn't have a response to that, so the admiral continued. "I don't begrudge the politicians' decision to throw you to the Council. It's an ... opportunity. I do begrudge this overdesigned piece of tin though. "

I looked back at the Normandy. I hadn't seen any other ships here, so I couldn't gauge whether or not it was overdesigned, but I did know that the stealth system was unique, at least here. It seemed like Shepard agreed with me.

"The Normandy is a fine ship, sir. She's served us well so far.  
"

"It's a gimmick Commander. Useless in a stand-up fight. This experiment diverted billions from our appropriations bills. For the same price, we could have had a heavy cruiser."

It was obvious the admiral was one of those 'charge at the enemy with the biggest men and guns' type of military strategists. Not that bad on ground based warfare, nearly useless in naval combat. If he had faced up against Captain Keyes, he would have very quickly gotten chewed up.

The admiral was still speaking. "But no, we had to play nice with the Turians. Throw money at this co-developed boondoggle."

Heh. 'Boondoggle.'

"I'm here to make an inspection, Commander. The Normandy is an Alliance warship. I expect to see she's up to snuff."

The commander didn't rise to the bait. "We'd be honored to show her to you, Admiral."

"I'll just bet. Wait here. I won't be long."

The admiral walked off into the Normandy, while Shepard, Tali, and I just stood there, waiting. It was maybe 5 minutes later when he came back out.

"Commander, I'm not happy."

Shepard seemed a little confused, but she didn't show it. "I'm sorry to hear that, sir."

Mikhailovich took that as an invitation to explain his problems with the ship. "Who designed that CIC? Putting the commander aft of everyone else is inefficient. What if he needs to discuss with the operators towards the bow?" Granted, this is a valid concern, but he should be bringing it up with the designers. Not the commanding officer.

Shepard didn't even miss a beat. "Modified Turian style. They prefer their commanders looking over their subordinates, rather than in the middle of them. We wanted to see how effectively they can command with that setup." Specific answer. Either Shepard put a lot of research into the Normandy's design, or she's making it up as she goes. Either way, the admiral seemed to accept that answer.

"Hmm. Reasonable goal. But they should have studied it in a lab, not on a front-line warship. I have to shake my head at that drive core of yours. 120 billion credits of element zero to make this thing move without giving itself away. You realize that we could have made drive cores for 12,000 fighters with that money? And what good is it to hide for a few hours, anyway? Useless!"

"We can loiter in an enemy system and monitor traffic, or drop infiltration teams on enemy worlds. The Normandy can be more useful than the Salarian STG."

Mikhailovich still didn't seem convinced. "Maybe, maybe. But that's not the job of a proper warship. We're supposed to find and kill the enemy fleet, not count how many times their garrison goes to the bathroom. And we need to talk about your crew, Commander."

I could see Shepard tense up slightly. I could guess where this was going.

Mikhailovich continued. "Krogan? Asari? Turians? And a Quarian and ... What exactly is that thing behind you?"

Shepard turned back a little to look at me, and I answered with a shrug. "Spartan."

Mikhailovich seemed a little confused before continuing. "And a ... Spartan." He paused a second to glare at me. "What are you thinking, Commander? You can't allow alien nationals free access to Alliance equipment!"

Shepard seemed a little annoyed at the admiral by that point. "Between Saren and the Geth, we have enough enemies out here. Treating other species with suspicion and distrust won't win us hearts and minds."

As much as I hated it, Mikhailovich voiced almost exactly what I was thinking. "That assumes the hearts and minds are worth winning. That hasn't been proven yet. You have anything else to say, Commander? Any other justifications for the state of this vessel?"

I could see Shepard take a deep breath, acting as if ready to begin a speech. On a whim, I stepped forward. "Actually, Admiral. I have a few things to say about the ship, with Shepard's permission, of course."

After a small nod from Shepard, I continued. I could see the curiosity in her eye.

"Let me start off by guessing that this is the Alliance's first stealth ship, am I correct?" With a cautious nod from Mikhailovich, I continued. "Now, since you have been spacefaring for a very short time, and have had no major battles, I will cut you some slack, and give you a little tactical advice about a stealth ship. Stealth ships are NOT 'front-line warships'. They are not built to take or give hits. They are not designed to perform as frigates in battle. They are designed to be used to infiltrate enemy lines, collect intel, and sabotage what they can. The most they can do to participate in a 'real fight,' as you would probably call it, is sneak behind enemy lines and get a few hits in on important enemy ships before fleeing. They are not designed for direct confrontation, and should not be

deployed as such without wasting their assets and abilities. They should be deployed to where normal warships can not go, such as on a hunt through potentially hostile systems on a hunt for a rouge SPECTRE threatening all of Humanity. And as for the non-Human crew, the only one with access to classified Alliance tech is that Quarian, and with what the others say of her skills, I'm sure she could have found some other way of gaining the intel. Thank you for listening to my counter-points." With a small nod, I stepped back behind Shepard.

Mikhailovich was stunned. It took him a minute before he could talk again. "Well, Commander. This has certainly been an ... interesting ... tour of the ship. I just want you to know, my report on your ship will not be as negative as I thought. My other report though," He again turned to glare at me, before turning back to Shepard. "Who can say?" And with that, Admiral Mikhailovich turned back, and walked away into the elevator.

Shepard turned to me, then started laughing. "Thanks for putting the Admiral in his place. If we had brought Ash with us, she wouldn't have been able to keep a strait face up halfway through that speech."

I gave a small snort. "All I did was say what we were all thinking. I was just the only one able to say it because I won't be charged with insubordination, or have caused a diplomatic incident. I may be military, but I'm not Alliance, so he's not my chain of command."

Tali gave a small laugh as well. "I just have one question though. Why did you say you were a Spartan, not a Human?"

I sighed. "Call me paranoid, but somehow I don't feel like we need to announce that there is a Human with highly advanced tech claiming to come from another universe. At least, it would cause a minor diplomatic incident for themAlliance until they can actually prove I am from another universe. At most, the STG, or some other group, will put a bounty on my head for all the advanced tech I have. Now though," I turned to look at the elevator, coming back up to our level, opening empty. "I'm not sure how long I can remain in anonymity."

Shepard just turned to me and said "You're paranoid. Now lets get down to the wards marketplace and look for whatever it is you need to get settled in."

We walked into the elevator, and I settled in, prepared for the worst, but hoping for the best. A fast elevator.

\* \* \*

><p>Well, sorry this is late. You know the deal around this time of year. Schools ending, last minute projects finals, the usual. On a side note, this chapter was originally going to be longer, but this took me long enough to just get this out. On the upside, I will hopefully get more time to write after school's over, meaning either faster updates, or longer chapters.<p>

Turns out I was disappointed once again. The elevator was taking a long time. And who knew what else was waiting for us at the bottom? With the long wait, I decided to talk with Saria some more.

"Saria, you got any info on the weapon schematics?"

"Yup. While you were talking with Admiral Boondoggle up there, I was searching the extranet for parts that might work in the guns. We're in luck. It turns out, most of the parts that we need for the turrets can be fabricated through Omnigel and an Omnitool, both of which we should be on our way to get now. However, due to the different nature of the charger and the other weapon, we need specialized equipment. Some of the stuff is fairly easy to get here, others? Not so much. I went ahead and made a list of the specialized parts that we need, or, failing that, the resources that we need to make them from scratch."

"That's great. Thanks. Now we know what we need."

With the conversation finished, and the elevator ride almost over, I didn't have long to wait. Almost at the bottom, the wall outside the clear, curved door gave way to glass. We were descending into a large, open room, at least several floors high, and directly opposite us was, surprise surprise, another elevator. Seems whoever designed the place had no idea of the meaning of the words 'impractical' or 'excessive.'

When we got down to the bottom, I could see a fairly large amount of people. One stood out, a human with a drone of some kind floating next to her. Great. A camera. I hate reporters. They never get the story right, and usually manage to twist everything I say. Eventually I just gave up.

The door opened, and my fears were confirmed. The reporter started calling Shepard's name, in true reporter fashion. Seems like Shepard hasn't reached the level of hate I have for reporters yet. Shepard walked up to the reporter, and the reporter took that as her cue. I took it as my cue to wander over to the other side of the room. With my hearing, I could still hear them, but they wouldn't notice me.

The reporter introduced herself. "Khalisa bint Sinan Al-Jilani, Westerlund News. Would you answer a few questions for our viewers?"

Shepard seemed a bit hesitant. "What do you want to know?"

The reporter just continued on. "You've been given a unique position to represent our race. People want to get a sense of how you'll do that." That earned a snort from me. I could already tell where this was going. Shepard still seemed a little hesitant. Tali just seemed confused at what was going on, and alternated between looking at Shepard, and looking at me, before deciding that she didn't want to be a part of this, and walked over to me. We both just stood there, listening.

Without warning, the reporter brought up what I assumed was an Omnitool, and the camera drone lowered a little bit, shining a light in Shepard's face. Classic interrogation technique. Catches the

victim off-guard. The reporter clearly wanted something, and an honest story wasn't it.

"Humans have been trying to get the respect of the galactic community for 26 years. With that in mind, what are your feelings on being the first human SPECTRE?"

Shepard kept calm. "The SPECTREs represent the best of every species in the galaxy. To be asked to join them is an honor." Almost exactly how I felt when that ONI spook approached me about the Spartan IV program.

The reporter didn't let the topic drop. She was fishing for something. "Some have said that your appointment is the Citadel 'throwing humans a bone.' Have you encountered any situations where the Citadel asked you to put their needs before the needs of Earth?"

Shepard was obviously skilled at a poker face. If she was annoyed, she didn't show it. "The Council is concerned with the needs of the whole galactic community. We're part of that community now. Our needs are on their agenda, but we're one of many." Privately, I thought that was a bit idealistic, but hey, I may be a bit prejudiced from the very similar alien society that deemed us sin incarnate and burned our planets to cleanse them of our 'filth.'

The reporter was surprised. "You really do believe that, don't you?" Shepard gave a slight nod, and the reporter dropped the subject. "You've been given command of an advanced human warship for your missions. Is there anything you'd like to say about it?"

"Actually, the Normandy was co-developed by human and turian engineers." Shepard couldn't seem to let this drop. "Its design incorporates many new innovations. All of which are classified, I'm afraid."

"So the turians have knowledge about the Normandy that is being kept secret from the Alliance public? Do you

"It's not a warship. It's meant for other purposes than upfront slugging rounds at the enemy. Do you think it was appropriate to hand over the Alliance's most advanced warship to the Citadel?"

"I wasn't aware the ship had been 'handed over' to anyone. I'm in command, and last time I checked, I'm human. Same goes for my crew. And it's not a warship."

"What do you mean, it's not a warship?"

"It's meant for something different. Due to the innovations, still classified, it can do things other ships can't." It was clear Shepard, no matter how calmed she seemed, both in appearance and voice, it was clear the reporter had gotten on her last nerve.

"Human, yes. but you do work for the Citadel now, Commander. One last question, Commander. Rumors back home say you're hunting a "rouge SPECTRE" named Saren. Do you have any comment on that?"

That was the last straw. Shepard was done. "Hold on. It's pretty



clear you have an agenda here. I'm not going to be a part of it. Excuse me." With that, she walked away. Shepard may have not said it out loud, but the reporter got the message.

"You can't just walk away, Commander. The public has a right to know!"

Shepard either didn't hear, or didn't care. She looked around for a second, then walked over to us. "Hey, thanks for leaving me out there to dry." Her comment was underlined with a playful glare into my visor.

Tali just shrugged, but I held my ground. "Reporters are high up on my list of things I hate. They may be under the Flood, the Covenant, and politicians, but they're still over running out of ammo."

She just looked at me for a second, then glanced at Tali. After a second passed, she just sighed and shook her head. "Figures the two people I bring with me when I have to face an admiral and talk to reporters are the two people on my ship who don't show their faces." That earned a small chuckle from me.

"So, now that the sidetracking is over, let's head to the markets. First, we need to get Thompson here an Omnitool. After that, who knows?"

I spoke up. "Actually, there a few things I might need. Mostly parts and other resources. Spare parts for fixing the Warthog, maintaining the turret, stuff like that."

Shepard thought about it, then nodded. "More firepower never hurts." She walked over to a terminal, and hailed a cab. We all climbed in, and I noticed there was no driver. Must be automated.

When we were all settled in, and the cab started off, Shepard turned to me. "So, Nick, do you know exactly what we're doing?"

I answered with a shrug. "Something about hunting a rouge SPECTRE?"

"Yes, but there's more. "

"Isn't there always?"

Shepard gave a short chuckle. "Yeah, I know what you mean. Anyways, this rouge SPECTRE in question wants to bring back a race called the Reapers, being intent on destroying all life in the galaxy."

I sighed. "Why is it alien maniacs always want a way to quickly kill everything in the galaxy?"

"You speak with experience."

I nodded. "Might as well add it to my job description at this point. Spartan Nick Thompson, Savior of the Galaxy." This caused a giggle from both Shepard and Tali, who was sitting in the back. "Yeah, I have experience."

The cab ride was over fairly quickly, and before I knew it, we were in the markets. It was simple getting me an Omnitool, and while the

others wandered around, looking at the stock, I took the time to figure out the Omnitool and talk with Saria.

"Saria, can you access the Omnitool?"

"Yeah. It's integrated into the armor computer systems, meaning I can get access easily."

"Good. Get that list ready. I'll give it to Shepard."

I made my way over to Shepard, and looked over her shoulder to see what she was browsing. It was a selection of weapons. Weapons of the same type that were magnetically attached to her back.

"Shepard, why are you looking at weapons? Don't you already have perfectly working ones? In surplus, if Ashley can give me a spare shotgun?"

"Yeah, but these are better. Overheat slower, do more damage."

"Wait. The Alliance doesn't give their soldiers top level weapons?" She nodded, hesitantly. "And the Council? You are a SPECTRE."

"Council SPECTREs are expected to be able to buy their own equipment with no help from the Council."

"What."

Shepard sighed, shaking her head. "I know. Stupid rule. Why are you asking all this?"

"I'm used to top quality equipment. Fighting a losing battle for survival for nearly 30 years tends to get the politicians' priorities in check. Anyways, I came over to tell you that I figured out the Omnitool, and managed to get a list of the supplies I need."

"Great. Send it to me, and I'll see what we can get."

I nodded, and typed out a few things on the Omnitool, masking Saria's sending of the data. Shepard looked over the list for a minute before looking up at me, eyebrow cocked in an obvious question.

"Some of this looks rather ... exotic for an old machine gun."

"It's more complicated than you think. Sure, it may not have a mass effect core, but it still has to have a rapid firing mechanism and motors for rotating the barrels to help cool them down and manage heat. And this all has to happen in sync, or the gun shreds itself. I also have a few other projects I want to work on putting together, mostly other guns and things like that."

She nodded. "I'll see what I can get."

"Thanks. Priorities are marked on the list."

We spent some time in the markets, finding most of what I needed, both parts and raw supplies. Sure, some of the things might end up a bit more boxy and cumbersome without the proper tools, but it would

get the job done. Mostly.

While we were looking for supplies, we came across some guy who seemed to know Shepard. "Commander Shepard? It's me, Conrad!" She sighed, and as she walked over to the man, I heard her mutter under her breath, "Not this guy again."

The exact details of the conversation escaped my attention, I was browsing a store at the time, but it ended with Shepard posing for a picture. Finished looking, I walked over to her. Tali made her way over as well.

Shepard looked at us, then at the retreating back of Conrad. "Well, that's over now. We get everything?"

I checked the list. Saria had helpfully crossed out everything we had gotten. "Almost. Just missing a few things."

Shepard nodded. "That's good. We'll head up to the market on the Presidium. I wanted to head up there anyways."

She led the way to another cab terminal, and we got in. The ride went quickly. We got out, I took a look around, and didn't like what I saw. Shepard must have noticed some unconscious tensing on my part, because she turned to me and asked "What's wrong? Crowds getting to you?"

I took another look around. I hadn't even noticed them the first time. "No. I don't like this place. Brings back bad memories." At least you can't see the other side of the ring overhead.

"What memories?"

"Pain. Death of friends. Weapons of galactic scale mass destruction. Unimaginable horrors."

She seemed stunned for a moment. "Oh. Will you be alright?"

"Yeah, probably. Just as long as someone doesn't start rhyming in my head about sins and other nonsense."

"Good. Markets this way."

I followed after the other two, still tense. I didn't like this place. Reminds me too much of a Halo. Luckily, we didn't need many parts, and they were easy to find. Just as we were about to leave, a turian in black and blue armor walked up to us. "Commander Shepard? The Council wishes to see you."

She looked confused. "I just talked to the after picking up T'Soni on Therum. Did they say what they want?"

The turian shrugged. "No. Just that you were supposed to bring the human," he gestured to me offhandedly. "With you. They didn't say anything else." The message delivered, the turian walked away.

I sighed. "Well, there goes escaping notice. We might as well get this over with."

Shepard nodded in agreement. "Might as well. Let's go. The elevator

up is not far."

Great. Another elevator. When we got to the base though, I was confused. There were no guards, no anything to stop the general public from entering the elevator. "Wait, does this go all the way up to the Council chambers?"

Shepard seemed confused. "Yeah, why?"

I looked around again. "No guards or anything?"

She just shrugged. "The Council isn't exactly known for making the best decisions. Come on."

I shrugged as well, and entered the elevator. Thankfully, this elevator seemed to go faster, though it still took a minute to get up the tower. Once we got to the top and out, I was even more confused. It was a large, wide open room. Must be a waiting room or something, the equivalent of waiting out on the steps of a building. I shrugged again, and followed Shepard. On a whim, I looked up, and couldn't believe my eyes. There was a line of skylights running the entire length of the room. Shaking my head, I climbed the steps after Shepard, and found myself on a short narrow walkway, a glass floor below, and under that, a small garden or park. Directly across the gap, three aliens were standing on a raised platform, and directly behind them was a massive wall of windows. Turns out the Council was stupider than I thought. There was no one to block entrance to their main meeting chamber, and said chamber had a large amount of extremely vulnerable windows. If someone wanted to take out the Council, it wouldn't take a top SpecOps strike team, merely one frontline troop with a good tactile sense. I shook my head, forcing their stupidity out of my mind. That was when I noticed the two humans already there at the end of the platform.

One was obviously military, dressed up in a uniform resembling the one the admiral from earlier was wearing. The other one, I wasn't so sure. He was wearing a white uniform of some sort. I couldn't tell what he was, until I saw the gleam in his eye. I settled on either corporate executive, or politician. I like neither.

The military one was patiently waiting for us. The politician was waiting for us, if you count yelling at the Councilors, specifically the turian Councilor, as waiting.

"This is an outrage! First you don't step in when the geth attack Eden Prime, and now you accuse us of having a super-soldier program behind your backs! Who do you think we are, batarians?!"

Shepard gave a small sigh, and muttered something I barely made out. "They never wait. Only time they wait is when I have the evidence."

As we stepped up, a little behind the officer and the politician, the turian made to give his reply, but was cut off by the asari.

"Ambassador, all the evidence points to a human super-soldier program, most likely sponsored by the Alliance. There is a self-proclaimed human super-soldier standing right behind you now."

The ambassador turned to look at me for a second, before turning back to the Council. He started to say something, but I cut him off. "If I may interrupt, Ambassador, the evidence points towards that only because you don't have all the evidence. As for how you learned of me, am I correct in guessing that Shepard sent a report to Alliance brass after she picked me up, and the salarian STG managed to intercept it?"

The salarian was the one to answer next. "That is correct. But it seems Commander Shepard left a lot out of her report."

I nodded. "I thought so. Ambassador, you may leave, now that the accusations are being settled, and you now have the answer of why you were accused."

The ambassador turned to me, eyes wide. "But I'm the human ambassador," he sputtered. "I represent all of humanity to the Council."

"No," I returned, slightly more annoyed than my ability to keep my voice under control. "You are the ambassador of the Alliance, the major government of humans, not all of humans themselves. It's just that up until now, all the humans have been part of the Alliance. You have no hold over a soldier in the military of a government that has spent nearly 400 years in space. You. May. Go."

The ambassador sputtered a little more, then turned on his heel, and marched angrily out of the room.

Saria choose that moment to speak up, at least, inside my helmet. "That wasn't a good way to make friends."

I just gave back a clipped response. "I don't like politicians."

She shot back, "Who said I was complaining?"

I turned back to the Councilors. "There. Now that that's settled. Anyways, I'm not from this universe. Where I'm from, humanity had over 800 colonies and went nearly 400 years in space before meeting another species. We have more advanced technology than you in some areas, less advanced in others. Our ships are much bigger, and we don't use eezo, but they were also a little slower. At least, before the war. And as for the super-soldier issue, I'm not even the first type of supersoldier the UNSC has created. Now that the greatly cut down overview is over, are there any questions?"

The asari was first. "400 years and 800 colonies?"

I nodded. "The UEG and the UNSC, it's military branch, were formed in the late 2160's, early 2170's. The year is now 2558."

The salarian was next. "Advanced technology, and no element zero?"

"We haven't discovered element zero in my universe, if there even is any to discover. Our FTL works by opening a small wormhole to another dimension, one with ... different, if not unstable, laws of physics. We don't actually travel faster than light, we just temporarily go somewhere where light is either faster, or that law of physics just

doesn't apply."

The asari cut in again. "How did you get 800 colonies without mass relays?"

I shrugged. "We can move fast, it's just that travel time is months, not hours. We also have better terraforming technology I guess."

The turian was next. "You said something about a war? And there are other types of super-soldiers?"

I paused. "That is a long, connected story. Lets start with the super-soldiers first. The first super-soldier project, Project Orion, also known as the SPARTAN Program, was mostly a failure. High mortality rate for slightly enhanced abilities. Later, the UNSC was having some trouble with a violent Insurrection. I know what you're thinking. That's not the war I was talking about. Anyways, they realized they were going to loose if they didn't take some harsh action. So they created a new super-soldier program, the SPARTAN-II Program. It was hugely successful, just not in the Insurrection. Only problem was the ... questionable ethics involved in the program."

The turian spoke up again. "'Questionable ethics'?"

"The program got its recruits by kidnapping young children. Anyways, like I said, the program was a huge success. A lower mortality rate than the Orion program, but still fairly high. The soldiers got heavy implants and augmentations, allowing them to perform way higher than normal humans. Then came the war. Around the time they got their augmentations, humanity made first contact. While you may think the humans here got a bad first contact, trust me. A three month battle for a single world was nothing compared to what we went through. Just to put it in perspective, here: three month long small battle, a fair amount of casualties. Back home: from 800 plus colonies to only Earth and a few other scattered colonies missed in the war. Uncountable death toll, partially because no one really wanted to know the numbers. Humanity decimated, yet we were still the 'victors' of the conflict."

The Councilors seemed stunned for a moment. The asari was the first to find her nerve. "Goddess. So many dead, so many colonies lost, and you won. What happened?" It came out a whisper, like she was afraid to learn the answer.

"First contact was with not a single race like the humans versus the turians here. We met a whole government, very similar to what you have set up here, no that I think about it. Three main rulers, each race in a different "place" in the society. Only difference was that there was just one race on top. Anyways, almost immediately after contact, the Covenant, that was what they called themselves, destroyed the colony they found. When I say destroyed, I don't mean bombing it like the turians did to Shanxi. I'm talking about bombarding the surface of the planet itself with heavy plasma weapons, burning the surface until nothing remained but glass". The Covenant was highly advanced technology wise, most of their technology was based off of the highly advanced species that came before them, like with you and the protoheans. Hey, look. Another similarity."

The Council just seemed more stunned. The turian was the first to speak this time. "Spirits, why would they do that?"

I continued. "Unlike the humans here, who had their 'war' happen because they got caught opening a relay, we did nothing wrong. We didn't find out until much later exactly why, but the Covenant leadership, the High Prophets, declared us the epitome of unholiness. They were a highly religious society, worshiping the Forerunners, the species who came before them, as gods. They declared us unworthy of existing, and so our colonies had to be burned clean of our 'filth.' We found out afterwards that this was actually the exact opposite. The Covenant religion says that the Prophets are the chosen of the Forerunners, and that they will lead their followers on a 'Great Journey' to transcendence. Everything about their religion was either wrong, or a lie. It wasn't the Prophets who were chosen by the Forerunners, but humans. The 'Great Journey' wouldn't lead them to transcendence, it would just kill all sentient beings in the galaxy. Truth's 'wisdom' was based on lies and falsehoods."

The Councilors seemed to be handling themselves better. Probably gotten stunned too, any times to feel it. The salarian was the one to clarify this time. "What do you mean that their 'Great Journey' would kill everything?"

"I'll get to that. It's all part of the story. After first contact, nearly 30 years of war followed. We were outmatched, and the Covenant were burning our colonies, one by one. We could hold the ground planet side, push them back and maybe defeat them, mostly through the help of the Spartans, the super-soldiers. They were the major hope. It wasn't a war to take back a colony, or punished the wrongdoers, it was a war of survival. So they created another SPARTAN project, the SPARTAN-III Project. This was probably the worst 'success' of the Spartans. The Spartan IIs, though highly effective, were also highly expensive, in training time, the augmentations, and their highly advanced armor. The SPARTAN-III Project's goal was to make Spartans cheaper. Only problem was that they knew the IIIs would mostly be subpar of the IIs, so most of them were trained and sent off, en masse, on essential suicide missions. They were not expected to survive. The sad part is that without them, we may not have survived."

"The war generally filled the same pattern. The Covenant would come land troops on one of our planets, us ground pounders would duke it out with the Covie land forces, maybe win, maybe lose, while the fleet got their asses kicked, trying anything they could do to stall them, save as many civilians as they could. The Covenant was too advanced. They had shields, they could withstand a couple hits from our MACs, while we didn't, and could only stay in the fight limping if their plasma torpedoes missed critical components. No matter how well we did on the ground, they would just retreat, and glass the planet from orbit."

"The war went on like that for 27 years, not really breaking the pattern much, at least until Reach. Think. What's your closest military outpost closest to your homeworld, but still in another system? That was Reach to Earth. It was also the biggest military outpost outside of Sol. The Covenant had skipped several colonies to get there, but when they did, they got a fight. It might have been the most disastrous defeat in the war for the UNSC, but the Covenant

didn't get out so well either. The UNSC fleet was partially destroyed, and scattered due to the Cole Protocol."

The turian interrupted me again. "Cole Protocol?"

"Military order. To keep the Covenant from finding our colonies easier, and to keep them from Earth for as long as possible. If you are facing a Covenant fleet, you have to be ready to purge all nav data from the ship's computers, and AIs hav-

The turian interrupted, nearly shouting, "AIs?!"

I sighed, and nodded. "AIs, but different from the geth. Based of a model of a human brain, they were essentially digitized humans, and thought of themselves as human. Now, as I was saying before I was interrupted. Nav data purged on defeat, AIs have to self destruct to prevent Covenant capture, and any ships fleeing the battle have to jump out on a random vector, away from any remaining human held worlds."

The turian, seemingly the militaristic one of the three Councilors, cut me off. "You not only let your ships flee, but inspire it in defeat?"

"It was a war of extinction. When faced with extinction, nearly any option is preferable. And it was less of fleeing the battle, more of retreating from a loss. Anyways, after the fall of Reach, that was when the interesting things started happening. All of this is highly classified, however. None of this goes to the crowd, and none of this leaves this room." I turned to glare at the hovering drone, very similar to the one the reporter from earlier was using.

Once all of the onlookers were gone, I continued the story. "Fleeing the fall of Reach, one ship, the Pillar of Autumn, found an ancient Forerunner artifact. A Forerunner artifact the size of a small moon. It was a massive ring, a Halo. We we managed to destroy the ring after finding out it's function. To kill all sentient life in the galaxy. The Forerunners had created it, and the six others in the ray, as well as numerous shield worlds and a massive Ark, outside of the firing range to shelter the inhabitants, to stop an ancient evil, too horrible to describe. There were only seven human survivors, and the ship's AI. Me, the legendary Spartan-II known only as the Master Chief, a critically wounded Spartan-II in cryosleep to keep her alive until medical attention, two other soldiers, a pilot, and a lieutenant in our equivalent of the STG. We managed to hijack a Covenant battleship, head back to Reach, pick up a few others that survived the glassing, take out a Covenant fleet almost ready to attack Earth, and get back to Earth with warning of the Covenant ready to attack, the Halo Array, and the evil it was designed to face.

"Then the Covenant attacked Earth. We managed to just barely fight them off, and follow them back to another Halo. We stopped them from firing the Array, without blowing it up, and managed to get the Elites, the main warrior race of the Covenant, on our side thanks to a one-two punch from the Prophets in the form of exposing their lies, and the Prophets betraying the Elites.

"Then the Covenant came back to Earth, and dug up a Forerunner device, buried near Voi. It turned out to be a portal to the Ark, the



main place to fire the Array from outside of the area of effect. We followed the Covenant through, and stopped them from firing the Array, but we were followed by the evil, which the Covenant had unintentionally awakened on both rings. We came up with a plan, and with just 4 of us and the AI, we were able to stop the evil by firing a replacement ring that the Ark had been building before it could be connected to the Array. We all made it back to the ship, but the Master Chief and his AI were lost before they made it all the way through the portal. They survived, but we didn't find them until years later.

"With the Covenant leadership dead, the Covenant was broken, and humans were the 'winners', at great cost. That's where the latest super-soldier project comes in, the SPARTAN-IV Program. I am a Spartan-IV. The program was created after the war so that we have troops who would be able to fight back and hold the line in case something like the war ever happens again. That answer all your questions?"

They seemed thoughtful for a moment, before the salarian spoke up. "What was that 'ancient evil' you kept talking about?"

I shuddered. "An evil so horrible, it inspires fear with its name. I've seen grown men, strong soldiers, babble in fear and cry for their mothers, trying to kill themselves. It doesn't help."

The Councilors were quiet for a moment, before looking at each other, and nodding. They turned back to me, and said something I had hoped they didn't, but had suspected they would. It was the asari acting as spokesperson. "We would like to believe you, but we have little proof beyond your own words, and the vid you arrived with. We're sorry, but there is only one way to be sure."

\* \* \*

><p>Hey there, finished this one a little early, so here you go. I also got a new vote for you guys.<p>

Vote #5: Melding

The Councilors' "only way to be sure," is to have an asari meld with Thompson to see if he's telling the truth. This may or may not happen though, honestly, it can go either way. Thompson knows he's seen things that could drive anyone else insane, so he's against it, not to mention doesn't want an alien poking around in his head. He's already got an AI in there. Will he succeed in talking the Council out of their plan?

Vote Closed.

### 13. Chapter 13

I stared at the Councilors, suddenly very suspicious. "What's this 'only way to be sure?'"

The asari Councilor continued on, apparently either unintimidated by a suspicious Spartan, or still ignorant of what a Spartan can do. "It's simple and painless. We have one of our asari agents meld with you and-"

I saw where this was going. "No. Not happening. I'm not letting someone else inside my head."

The turian Councilor glared at me with returned suspicion. "Why? Do you have something you're trying to hide from the Council?"

I didn't rise to the bait. "Yes. In addition to the various military secrets I know, I know several different things that have driven a great many people to suicide. I have fought against horrors unimaginable. They have driven more than a couple people completely insane. I can't guarantee that anyone poking around in my memories will come out sane. Don't do this."

The Councilors paused for a minute, then turned to each other. They must have turned off their microphones or something, because it looked like they were talking, but I couldn't hear anything. After a couple of minutes of what looked like a heated debate, they finished up, and turned back to us. The asari was again the one to act as spokesperson.

"It is the decision of this Council that we will go ahead with the meld test. Your claims are just too outlandish to take as the truth, and you are too dangerous an individual to just simply dismiss. There is nothing more you can do to affect our decision. Unless, you feel like trying to resist."

The security in the room took this as their cue to step a little closer, and start reaching for their guns. Not one for being intimidated, I started reaching for my weapons as well, before Shepard stopped me by grabbing my wrist with a slight shake of her head. "Don't make things difficult. We don't want an incident." She spoke under her breath so the Councilors or the officers wouldn't hear us.

I sighed, then nodded, withdrawing my hand from my guns. I turned back to the Council. "Fine. I won't argue. I still think its a stupid decision, but if you want to risk a spectre, that's your call, not mine."

The asari Councilor nodded. "Thank you for your co-operation. Now, if you'll take off your helmet, our agent will be here soon."

I didn't say anything, just taking off my helmet carefully, making sure Saria's chip stayed in the helmet. It wouldn't do it have her be discovered now, especially when the Council seems very ready to disbelieve me.

A few minutes passed, during which I spent most of the time glaring at the Council, who seemed slightly uncomfortable under my gaze, blunted by the visor no longer, while Shepard and Tali fidgeted impatiently. The officer stood still, either through some familiarity of waiting for this, or through what was more than likely a long military career. Eventually, a somewhat young looking asari came out from somewhere to the side of the podium and Council platform. She looked a little older than Liara, but not as old as the Councilor standing in front of me. She stopped at the edge of the pit, and turned towards the Council. "You wanted to see me?" She seemed a little confused by the summons, and occasionally slipped a peek back at the podium towards the five of us standing there.

The asari spoke once more. "Yes. You have some experience with the humans, is that correct?"

The asari spectre still seemed confused. "I have visited several human colonies, yes. Why?"

"We need you to look through the memories of that human," She paused to point at me, "and tell us what you see. He has told a story that is a little ... difficult to believe offhand without any solid proof."

The spectre nodded, accepting the answer, and made her way over to me. She paused right before me and quietly asked, "Are you ready for this?"

I responded with a simple "Are you?" At her confused glance, I just nodded. "I'm ready."

She hesitated for just another moment, before steeling herself. She closed her eyes and placed her hand on my face, and ignoring the small flinch, started speaking. "Just relax, and let your mind open itself to the universe. Feel the flow of the tide, in and out. Embrace eternity." And with that, her eyes snapped open again, this time nearly pure black.

Images flashed through my head, almost too fast to catch. Climbing things with my friends back on Actium. Finding ways to jump off said things without serious injury. Going through school. Seeing another news report about another colony going dark, this time even closer to us. Enrolling in the marines, hoping to be able to help protect my planet. Getting on the ship headed to Reach for training. Waking up from cryo, getting the news that my home was glassed. Asking to see the images, almost immediately regretting it. Hearing that my family made it off the planet on a refugee ship, headed to another colony. Training on Reach. Getting deployed for the first time. Seeing my first Covie in person, almost getting shot. Shooting back. Lots of shooting back. Seeing my first Spartan, saving my ass. Getting the offer to join the ODSTs. More training. More combat, being dropped from orbit. More planets glassed to a crisp. Getting recalled to Reach to help defend it against the Covenant. Dropping, finding out halfway down our ride just got shot down. Fighting the Covenant on Reach. Getting the call that Reach was lost, to find a way off. My unit and I fighting our way to the Aszod ship-breaking yards, meeting up with two Spartans. Getting to the Pillar of Autumn with one Spartan dead and the other left behind. Cryosleep. Waking up above Halo, dropping down. Linking up with the Master Chief for the assault to break out Keyes. Hunting for the control room. Encountering the Flood, the horror at seeing the conversion. Fighting our way off the ring. Fighting back to Earth. Fighting the Covenant, following them to another Halo. Teaming up with the Elites to stop Halo from firing. Going back to Earth. Watching the streak that was the Master Chief fall from the descending Forerunner ship. Fighting our way through Voi to stop the Covenant from digging up the artifact. Fighting the Flood. Following the Covenant. Stopping Truth from lighting the rings. Fighting through High Charity. Fighting on the replacement, fighting Spark. Fleeing the ring. Moving to the bridge to try to help the Arbiter and Johnson pilot the ship, fighting through the pain. Making it through with half a ship. Splashdown. SPARTAN-IV offer. The pain of the augmentations. More training. The ops on Requiem. Going

through the portal. Fleeing the Geth ship, wrestling the krogan. And that was just the visual part of what flashed through my head.

And then it was over. The asari stumbled back a little, mumbling something incoherent, and I just blinked a little, shook my head to clear it. When I looked back up, the asari was saying something that sounded suspiciously like, "I won't let them get me." Tears were forming in her eyes. Dulled as my senses were from the mother of all flashbacks, it took a second to notice her hand going for the pistol on her hip. I lunged forward, and managed to wrench the gun from her grasp before it was halfway to her head. Everyone gave a sigh of relief. The asari noticed me again, and whispered one word. "How?" I knew what she meant.

I collected my thoughts, my head still spinning slightly from the meld. "Don't let it break you. They want you to give up, so just keep on fighting. Find something to fight for, even if its just to spite the ones that want to bring you down. If you give up, you lose."

She paused for a moment, contemplating my barely whispered words, visibly attempting to calm herself, then nodded. There were still a couple tears on her face, but I was satisfied that, while more than likely scarred from seeing ten years worth of brutal war in the span of a few seconds, she had succeeded in pulling herself together, no longer at risk of killing herself. I handed her back her gun, then stepped back. Those that can control themselves right after the first sight can usually control themselves for afterward.

Everyone in the room let out a breath. With the situation defused, I turned back to the Council. "I warned you."

With the ice broken, but everyone still shaken, the Council pressed on to business. The salarian was the one to speak. "Farin, what did you see?"

The shaken asari took another deep breath before speaking. "After a somewhat normal childhood, he entered the military. Humans were fighting a war for survival against several alien races, all trying to kill them. They fought as well as they could but it was not enough. They barely managed to survive."

The asari Councilor nodded. "Thank you, Farin. That will be all. You may leave now."

The asari nodded gratefully and made her way out as quickly as possible, with one last glance back over her shoulder at me.

The exciting events over, I pulled my helmet back on. Saria chimed in with a quick comment. "That could have gone better. But it could have been much worse too."

I ignored her, to busy being angry at the Council to pay much attention. "There. You believe me now? It nearly drove someone insane, but you have your proof now, right?" I couldn't stop some of my anger from bleeding into my voice.

The turian Councilor nodded. "Yes, yes. All charges against the Alliance are dropped." I turned to leave. "Now, before you leave, one last question. What do you plan on doing here?"

I paused. That was a good question. Finally obtaining an answer, I turned back to face them. "For now? Help Shepard hunt down Saren. After that?" I shrugged. "I don't know. Try to find a way home? Maybe continue to help out Shepard? I haven't really had much time to think about it."

Final question answered, I turned to leave. Shepard and the others must have slipped out while I was answering that question, because they were waiting for me at the bottom of the steps. I could see that the military man wanted to talk, so I let him.

"Thompson, was it?" At my nod, he continued. "I'm Captain Anderson. I used to be the commanding officer of the Normandy, before Shepard became a spectre. The whole Alliance is wondering what you plan on doing. If you like, we could probably accommodate you."

I thought about it for a moment. "If you're talking about getting me to join the Alliance military, save your breath. I'm already in the UNSC, and even though they don't exist here, I still need to find a way home. Thank you for the offer, but I don't think so."

He nodded. "I didn't think that would work, but Udina insisted. Well, I should probably get back. maybe he's calmed down by now."

Shepard cut in, shaking her head. "Captain, based on how red his face was when he left, I think you should stop for lunch before you go back."

Anderson sighed. "You may be right. It was nice seeing you Shepard, remember to stop by if you need anything."

She nodded. "I will."

Anderson walked out towards the elevator, just as people started to trickle back in to the room. Shepard sighed, then shook her head. "Come on, lets head back to the Normandy. I think that's enough excitement for one day."

Luckily, there was a cab terminal right by the bottom of the stairs. It didn't take long for the cab to arrive and the three of us to climb in. The ride back to the Normandy was mostly silent, aside from a few ads that came over the radio. I figure Shepard and Tali were either giving me space, or trying to digest what happened back in the Council chambers.

It wasn't long before we returned to the bottom of the elevator to the dock, and we had to suffer through the unusually long elevator ride once again. Once we got to the top, Shepard pulled me over.

"Nick, you should go have a check up with Dr. Chakwas, the ship's doctor. We have a little while before we pull out, and I want to be supplied with whatever you might need. Rations, meds, whatever."

"Alright. Sounds reasonable."

Shepard went back down the elevator, and I turned and walked into the Normandy. Quickly making my way towards the back and the stairs, I passed by the med bay to make a stop in the cargo bay first. From my

experience, doctors don't like it when you show up in full armor. Even more so when it's the half a ton MJOLNIR. Luckily, in the glove boxes of warthogs assigned to Spartan fire teams, there is a toolkit for removing the armor, for field emergencies like part replacement or medical action. It took about 15 minutes to get everything off, much longer than it would have taken with the correct equipment. Oh well. Not much I can do about that. I made sure to leave Saria with the armor pieces. No one was all that likely to go digging around in armor pieces they could barely lift, and doctors tended to be very observant.

I suffered through the tortuously long elevator ride once again, this time feeling slightly vulnerable without the armor. A couple years ago, I thought the armor was claustrophobic, and it would have been nice to get out. It's funny how a couple years living on the battlefield in what amounts to almost tank level protection can change one's perceptions.

I walked into the surprisingly small meld bay of the Normandy and saw a older, gray haired woman sitting at a desk in the back. She got up when she saw me walk in.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Chakwas, the Normandy's medical officer. You must be the man we picked up from picked up from Trebin."

"I guess so. I'm Spartan Nick Thompson. Shepard sent me here to get a checkup from you before we leave so we would be stocked with whatever might be needed to treat me."

She nodded. "Alright, lets get started. First, are you supposed to be taking any kind of medication or anything like that?"

I paused to think about it for a moment. "Nope. They took me of the post-aug meds a year ago. Something about my physiology being highly adaptive to the implants."

She nodded again. "Okay then. Now, I need you to take that off for a more in-depth examination."

The exam was fairly quick, normal for a checkup, aided by the Omnitool Chakwas used throughout the exam. Once I was dressed again, she wanted to talk to me again.

"Okay, you are healthy, in great condition. However, there were a few things I wanted to talk to you about. First, your scars. I haven't seen anyone with that many, or that severe. Usually medi-gel eliminates scars. How did you get them? And what about that particularly large one accords your back?"

"Where I'm from, we don't use medi-gel. Haven't invented it. Instead we use biofoam, a compound that just seals wounds on the field, patches you up until you can get to a surgeon back on the ship. So if you get shot at, you're going to collect scars. The burn wounds are from the plasma weaponry the Covenant likes to use. The occasional bullet wounds are from Insurrectionists, or ... them. "

She looked confused. "'Them?'"

I shook my head. "Not something I like talking about. Anyways, the large scar on my back was from a glancing blow from a particularly

powerful Forerunner weapon. I caught some of it saving a friend."

Chakwas nodded again. "Okay. Now on to the next topic. Several differences are present in your body structure that make you different from normal humans, including enlarge adrenal glands, and most obviously, your bones are plated in a dense form of ceramics."

"Those were some of the augmentations of the SPARTAN-IV project. Aim was to make soldiers that are faster, stronger, and tougher than average soldiers."

Chakwas stated simply, "Well, I'd say they succeeded. And that brings me to my next question. Your DNA is slightly different. Still recognizably human, but some parts are tweaked, some parts were added, and a few parts from the normal human genome were missing. Was that part of the augmentation program as well, or from something different?"

I shook my head. "Not a part of the augs. For the most part, they stayed away from genetics. If you're looking for someone to blame, blame the Librarian."

Chakwas was very confused at that statement. "What does a librarian have to do with your genes?"

"No, not a librarian, the Librarian. Or at least, the representation of her. It was a digital copy of a Forerunner, the rough equivalent of your protheans. She tweaked the genes of me and a comrade to, among other things, make us immune to the effects of one of their artifacts. I'm not sure what effect any other tweaks that were done have. Our conversation was cut a bit short."

Chakwas still seemed a little confused, but accepted my explanation. "And what were the effects of this artifact?"

"It was, at the time, being used as a weapon, digitizing human intelligence at the cost of bodies, but there was a flaw in the process. The minds would end up warped and twisted, useful only as tools of war to the one using the artifact."

Chakwas looked horrified. "That's horrible. That someone would do that... Inconceivable."

I nodded slowly. "Yes, it is. Now, Doctor, if you can do me a favor and lend me a sample of medi-gel?"

She nodded and went to get one. "Why, if I may ask?"

"I'm going to try to lace medi-gel into my existing biofoam reserves, hopefully to try to lessen the number of necessary future visits."

She handed me the sample, and with a quick "Thank you," I was on my way down to the bay to get back in my armor.

\* \* \*

><p>Here it is. Still not satisfied with a couple parts, but oh well.

Just a heads up, progress on the next chapter may be stalled by forces outside of my control. I'll do what I can if I have time, but it might be a while. So, in an effort to get this out of the way now and speed up the next chapter release a little bit, have another vote.<p>

Vote 6: Feros Resolution

Either way, side quests will be done and colonists will be spared. This just is about Shiala and Jeong.

Vote Closed.

Also, I would like to thank Invader Viceroy for spotting some mistakes I have made in some earlier chapters.

End  
file.